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HIS MIND**

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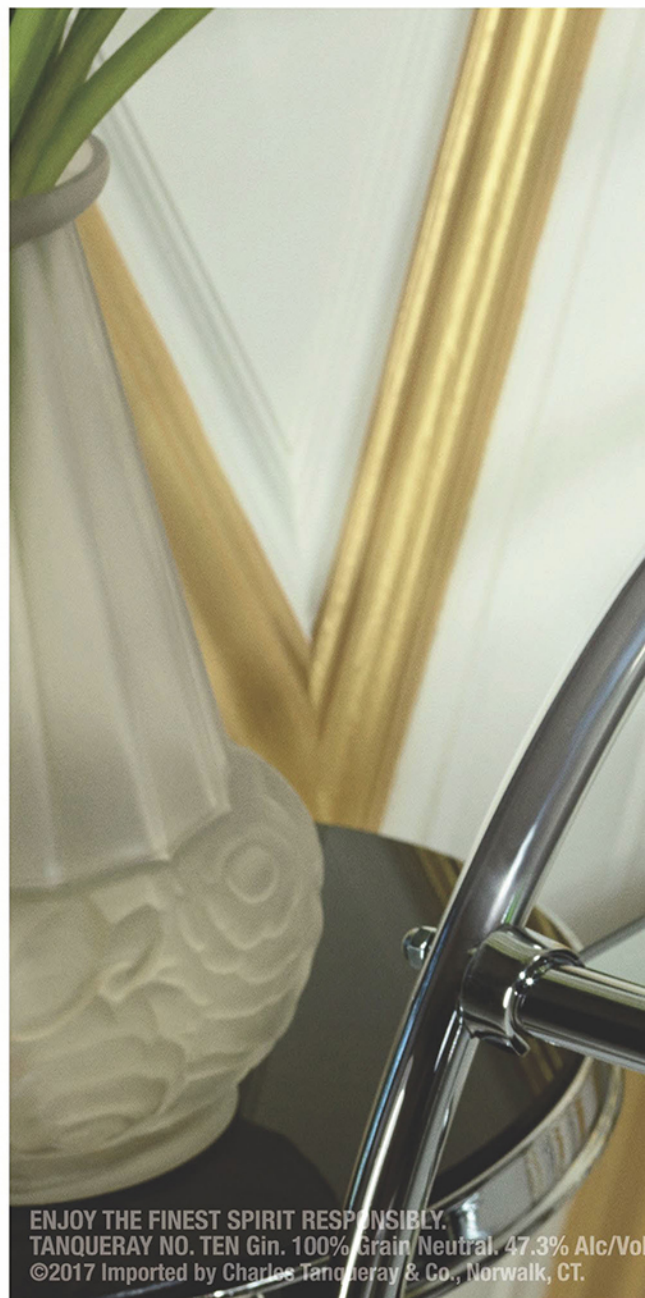
Garnish cocktail with half a slice of
grapefruit and sprig of thyme.

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Tanqueray NO. TEN



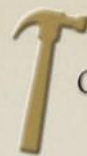
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58



72



46

ON THE COVER

Maggie Siff brings her talent to Showtime's "Billions." photograph by Jim Wright

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ME
0** NICARAGUA
505

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Cigars Are Not A Safe Alternative
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drink **89** **GIN IS BACK IN**
Think of it as the oldest, most complex, most arcane version of flavored vodka imaginable—or just take it as it is: a fine beginning to a great cocktail.

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144 **MOMENTS TO REMEMBER**
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152 **MADE FOR YOU**
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89



104



128

highlights

With monster scores of 94 points, outstanding on our ratings scale, a trio of fine cigars from two of the industry's most popular producers topped this issue's tasting. The Padrón 1964 Anniversary Series Toro, exclusive to Tobacconists' Association of America merchants, paced the robustos while the rare Arturo Fuente Don Carlos Eye of the Shark tied with a Padrón Serie 1926 to lead all figurados. This superb tasting continued with newcomer Archetype Axis Mundi Toro (93 points) leading the corona gorda category, while the Alec Bradley Post Embargo Lancero was the best-performing oddity, scoring 92 points in the miscellaneous category. Cuba's traditional-sized Por Larrañaga Petit Corona (91 points) showed that a cigar needn't be large to make a big impression. Altadis U.S.A. turned to the Plasencias for the Romeo 505 Nicaragua, a modern take on an old brand.



TOP ROBUSTO

PADRÓN 1964 ANNIVERSARY SERIES TORO

This box-pressed cigar, wrapped in natural leaf, is an extension of the lauded Padrón line, sold only in TAA-member shops.

NICARAGUA

94



TOP FIGURADO

ARTURO FUENTE DON CARLOS EYE OF THE SHARK

A gorgeously dark Cameroon wrapper covers the all-Dominican insides of this curiously semi-pressed figurado, which tied with a Padrón Serie 1926 No. 2.

DOM. REP.

94



TOP CORONA GORDA

ARCHETYPE AXIS MUNDI TORO

Rolled by Drew Estate for Ventura Cigars, this smoke sports a dark, Ecuadorian Habano wrapper, Indonesian Sumatra binder and Nicaraguan filler.

NICARAGUA

93



TOP MISCELLANEOUS

ALEC BRADLEY POST EMBARGO LANCERO

This lancero is slightly thicker than standard, and is made with two binders—one from Nicaragua and the other from Honduras.

HONDURAS

92



TOP CHURCHILL

ROMEO 505 NICARAGUA BY ROMEO Y JULIETA CHURCHILL

The first all-Nicaraguan Romeo y Julieta to be made in Nicaragua, this cigar is produced by the Plasencia family for Altadis U.S.A.

NICARAGUA

91



TOP PETIT CORONA

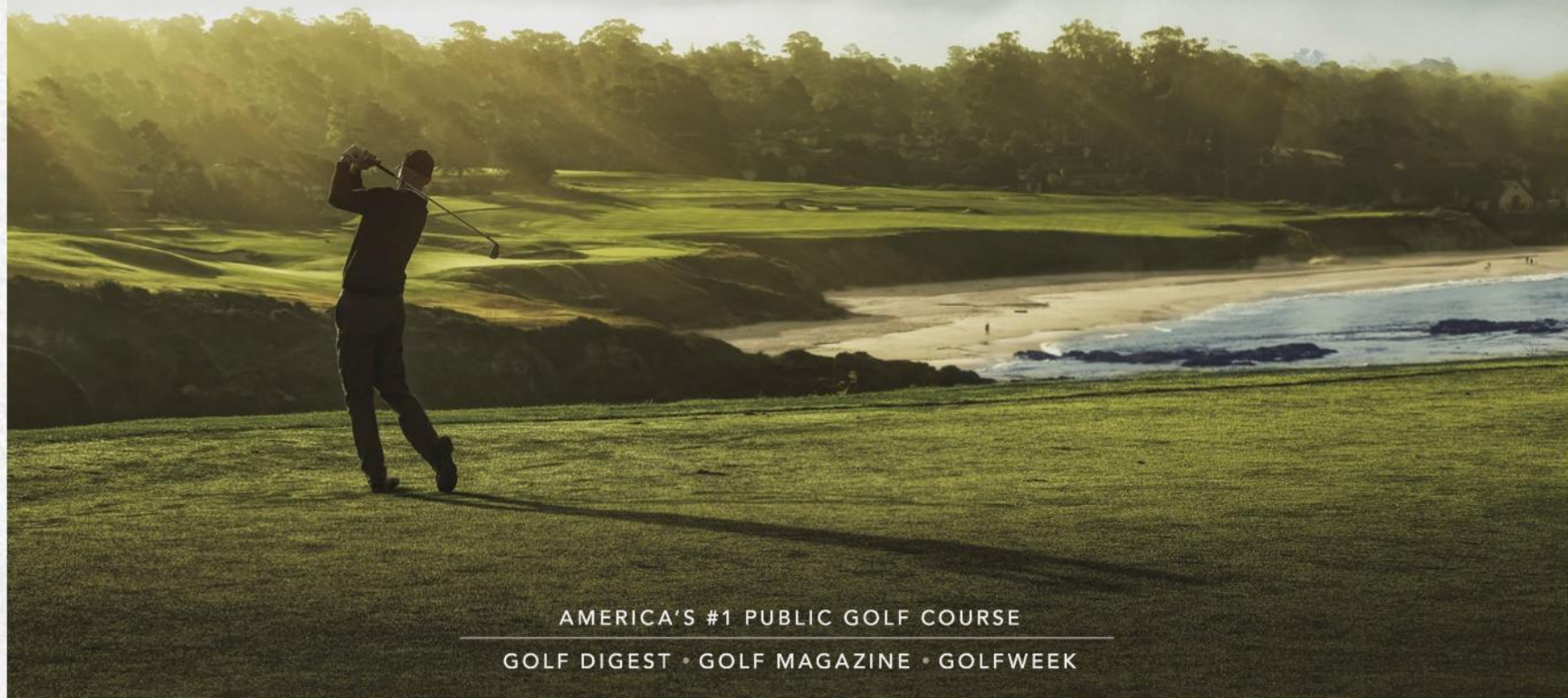
POR LARRAÑAGA PETIT CORONA

In Cuban cigar factories the petit corona is known as a mareva, and this smoke is covered in an attractive, golden-brown wrapper.

CUBA

91

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The Lodge
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Fairway One Cottage Living Room



editor's note

An Open Letter to Newly Named FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb

Dear Dr. Gottlieb,
Congratulations on your May 9, 2017 appointment as FDA commissioner. You step into this role at a crucial time.

I am writing you on behalf of a small, artisanal industry—the handmade cigar industry—which has a proud heritage dating back more than 200 years. It is composed primarily of small and medium-sized businesses, many of them family owned.

They fear extinction. Not from market factors, nor from consumers rejecting their products, but from their own government. The Obama Administration moved control of the cigar industry to the FDA, and after years of threats and uncertainty the FDA has shackled the cigar industry with a great number of unmanageable operational restrictions, not the least of which is severely limiting the introduction of new products. Even more restrictions are scheduled to follow in the coming months. All of these prohibitions are starting to strangle the industry.

Millions of Americans smoke handmade cigars. Firefighters. Policemen. Lawyers. Doctors. Professors. Congressmen. Judges. Members of our military. Friends of yours and friends of mine. Adults from all walks of life. Working Americans who every day contribute to our society and our economy.

While President Trump has voiced his outrage at overregulation in the United States, and has taken on deregulation as a major policy initiative, the cigar companies who represent this great industry find themselves in dire need of relief.

More than \$3 billion was spent on lobbying last year alone in the United States, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. Look at the spending by sector: the pharmaceutical industry alone spent \$246 million on lobbying last year. The insurance industry spent \$147 million, oil and gas spent \$119 million, and the auto industry \$62 million.

The small, handmade cigar industry doesn't have that type of financial strength. As a result, it's being swept under the carpet, lumped into the far-larger cigarette and machine-made cigar industries, which

it has nothing to do with and wants nothing to do with. The handmade cigar industry has had little say in its own affairs.

In order to comply with the FDA's new restrictions, cigar companies are facing the prospect of enormous new costs—hundreds of thousands of dollars per company—that are onerous, burdensome and most of all unnecessary.

A new study, partially funded by the FDA—yes, your FDA—and published on January 26 in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, documented that premium cigars are not being smoked by the youth of America. The two-year study looked at the behavior of more than 45,000 people, including 13,651 youths, and found that the number of youths who frequently or regularly smoke handmade cigars was less than one percent—statistically irrelevant. Handmade cigars are enjoyed by adults, period.

We need your help. If left unchecked, these new FDA regulations will destroy the handmade cigar industry, and the tens of thousands of American jobs it supports.

The families who work in this industry are not looking for special treatment. They only ask for just and fair treatment. The right to sell a legal, handmade product to consenting adults. The right to pursue the American dream.

I ask you to please look into these unfair and unjust restrictions the FDA is forcing down the throat of this proud and venerable industry.

My best,

MARVIN R. SHANKEN
EDITOR & PUBLISHER

CC: President Donald Trump

CC: Vice President Mike Pence

CC: Tom Price, Secretary of Health and Human Services

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WE NEED YOUR HELP

If you're a friend of the cigar, now is the time to write Washington.

The Food and Drug Administration is making it harder and harder for family-owned, handmade cigar companies to produce and sell their products. The new rules are unnecessary and highly political, and they will drive companies out of business, leaving you with fewer choices in your humidor, changing the cigar industry forever.

It needs to stop.

Write the new FDA commissioner, Dr. Scott Gottlieb, and President Donald Trump. Let them know how you feel. Tell them handmade cigars deserve an exemption from FDA control. It's time to deregulate the handmade cigar industry and let this small, artisanal and venerable business continue without government interference.

Write now:

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Scott Gottlieb, M.D.
Commissioner
U.S. Food and Drug Administration
10903 New Hampshire Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20993

You can also visit our website, cigaraficionado.com, to generate a letter, allowing you to let your voice be heard in the halls of the U.S. government.

THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW

Marvin R. Shanken
Editor & Publisher

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out of the humidor

Dear Marvin,

From the first time I watched “Shark Tank,” Daymond John [“A Shark with Style,” June 2017] impressed me both with his business acumen and his personality. If I were ever on the show, convincing him to make a deal would be my ultimate goal.

Since that scenario is extremely unlikely, instead I’ll just hope he soon achieves his own goal of experiencing a well-deserved Cuban Cohiba.

Rich Foley

Fayette, Ohio

Dear Marvin,

I’m certainly glad that Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger got back on the cover of CIGAR AFICIONADO [“You’re Fired,” February 2017]. We missed him. Too bad he wasn’t born in America. I think he would have made a great president of the U.S.A.

A recent editorial from *The New York Times* doesn’t give President Trump high marks toward his relationship with Cuba. I hope as time goes on that will change.

I’m 72 years old, and to my best recollection I have only smoked two Cubans so far. President Trump may be killing my dream. There’s a saying that any guy over 50 years dreams of driving a Porsche and smoking a Cuban cigar.

About one year ago my wife and I went to the Dominican Republic. While staying at the hotel one night my wife had a meeting and I took a walk to the main entrance of the hotel and their pool tables. All was going great and got even better when the perfumed aroma of a cigar came across the room. A fella shooting pool at another table had lit up a cigar. Wow! Later I went over and spoke with him. Even after all this time, the event—and the aroma—still linger in my memory.

Every CIGAR AFICIONADO is a gem. Keep up the great work.

Bob Blauvelt

Rockland County, New York

Editors’ Response: Here’s to happy dreams of driving a Porsche and smoking a Cuban cigar. Remember: a fine cigar is one of life’s truly affordable luxuries. As to the Cuban plans of President Trump, it’s far too early to judge how this new administration will look at U.S.-Cuba relations.



“Daymond John impressed me with both his business acumen and his personality. I hope he soon achieves his goal of experiencing a Cuban Cohiba.”

—Rich Foley, Fayette, Ohio

Dear Marvin,

I’m an avid reader of your magazine but I also belong to a few cigar groups on various social media platforms. I often see comments in these groups that debunk the CIGAR AFICIONADO ratings as nothing more than a gimmick and shouldn’t be taken as any real endorsement or rating of the cigars sampled.

Obviously taste and experience are subjective and we all have different likes and dislikes—for me personally I use the ratings to give me a general idea of what to look out for. The gist of these negative comments is not the ratings themselves, but that you only rate cigars (and rate highly) for producers/brands that you either have a connection with (for example

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those that advertise with you) or those that you have some other vested interest in keeping sweet, to coin a British term.

I've never seen any evidence of this myself and have regularly responded to comments such as these rebutting that theory. However I often get shouted down. It's OK. I'm a big boy and can handle it.

Can you please put to rest once and for all these supercilious comments by explaining the procedures you use to select the products you sample?

All the best from the other side of the pond.

John Papanicolaou

Brighton, England

Editors' Response: Our ratings have great impact upon the cigar industry, and we take them quite seriously. We choose the cigars we rate not based upon advertising but by market presence. We aim to provide our readers with a buying guide to the cigar market, and aim to review cigars that a reader would find when shopping in a cigar store. For that reason, we rate cigars with broad distribution, and avoid those that have little distribution. That's one reason why you won't find private-label cigars in our ratings, cigars that are made for one shop, or one small chain of shops.

We've said it over and over, but it bears repeating: our ratings are conducted blind, meaning the tasters do not know the brand, price, country of origin or any other detail about the cigar when they rate it. In addition, the tastings are managed by our tasting coordinator—who is not a member of the tasting panel, because he knows the code. He buys the cigars we taste at retail shops.

We rate cigars from companies that advertise, as well as companies that do not advertise, and we give high and low ratings to both. The evidence is clear to see for those, like you, who do their research on the subject. Perhaps the most obvious evidence would be our ratings of Cuban cigars, which have never been able to advertise in our pages due to the longstanding U.S. Embargo on Cuba. Cuban cigars have rated highly over the years, and three Cuban cigars have been named Cigar of the Year, our highest accolade.

This is our 25th year of publishing CIGAR AFICIONADO and reviewing cigars, and we have never compromised our values. Our ratings cannot be influenced by advertising, and they never will.

Dear Marvin,

I love your publication and read it cover to cover. I especially love seeing all the cool photos of people enjoying cigars.

I love cigars (I have four humidors myself), and love your publication and what you guys are doing for the industry.

Keep up the good work!

Jason Valchine

Chelsea, Michigan ❖



Maduro No. 40


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something I remembered.
I wanted to go back to my
childhood. I wanted to go back
to the happiest moments of my
life. I wanted my grandfather
to be proud of me. I wanted my
father to be proud of me and
my children to someday be
proud of me. It was something
I had to do."

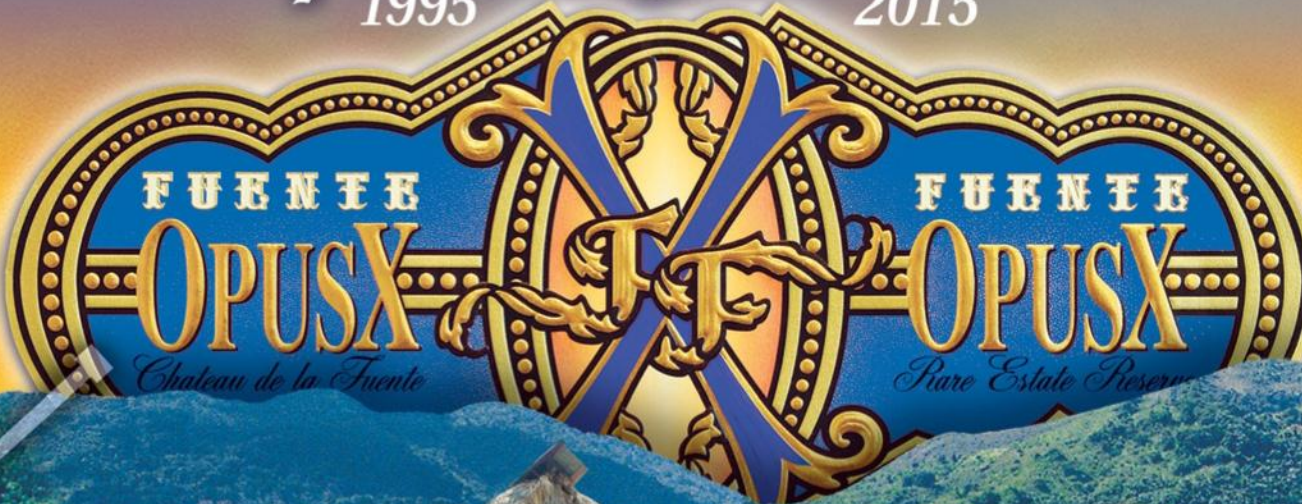
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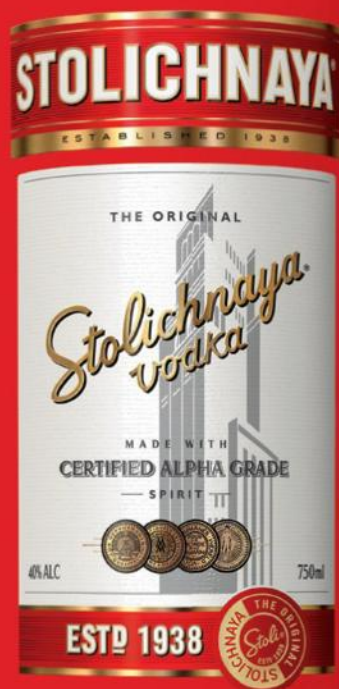
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SUMMER 2017

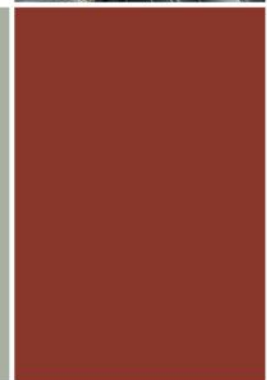
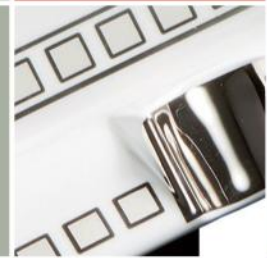


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good life guide

Living well demands that we indulge in things that are of superior quality and excellent origin. This guide aspires to find and recommend the best of everything to aficionados of the good life.

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Bone China Ashtrays

Cigar ashtrays are often oversized statements of masculinity. They could be made from a hefty slab of metal, a portly hunk of ancient wood or perhaps a brick-thick slab of ceramic. These hefty and prominent items are perfectly at home in the man cave or neighborhood cigar shop. But what if you are seeking an ashtray for a space you share with a significant other or in a room where you wish to smoke your cigars while maintaining a certain amount of elegance? Enter the bone china ashtray.

Bone china is strong without being thick, allowing for a less bulky vessel to hold your cigars. Bone china is something you may have once found in your mother's cupboard or on the table of a fancy tea party you were badgered into attending. Nevertheless, bone china makes for a considerably attractive and understated cigar ashtray.

If you think it's not fitting to drop ash in such a lovely thing, know that bone china begins with bone ash, which is made from heated animal bones. That ash is mixed with other materials—kaolin, feldspar and quartz—to make the end product.

"Compared to ceramic ashtrays, bone china ashtrays are stronger and more resistant to chipping," says Keith Park of Prometheus. Then there's the look, that "snow white" appearance that makes it so sharp on your desk. "Bone china ashtrays look translucent," says Park.

Prometheus has had bone china ashtrays in its portfolio since the early 2000s. The art deco Bone China Quadri Ashtray (\$89.95), pictured here, has a stately elegance with its platinum accents. The piece measures 8 1/4 by 6 3/4 inches, and its lack of branding makes it especially stately.

Davidoff makes a porcelain bone ashtray, with 14-karat-gold script, along with understated company branding. It retails for \$100.

Whatever the choice, know that bone china will never be cheap. They are "always more expensive than ceramic ashtrays," says Park.

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—David Savona



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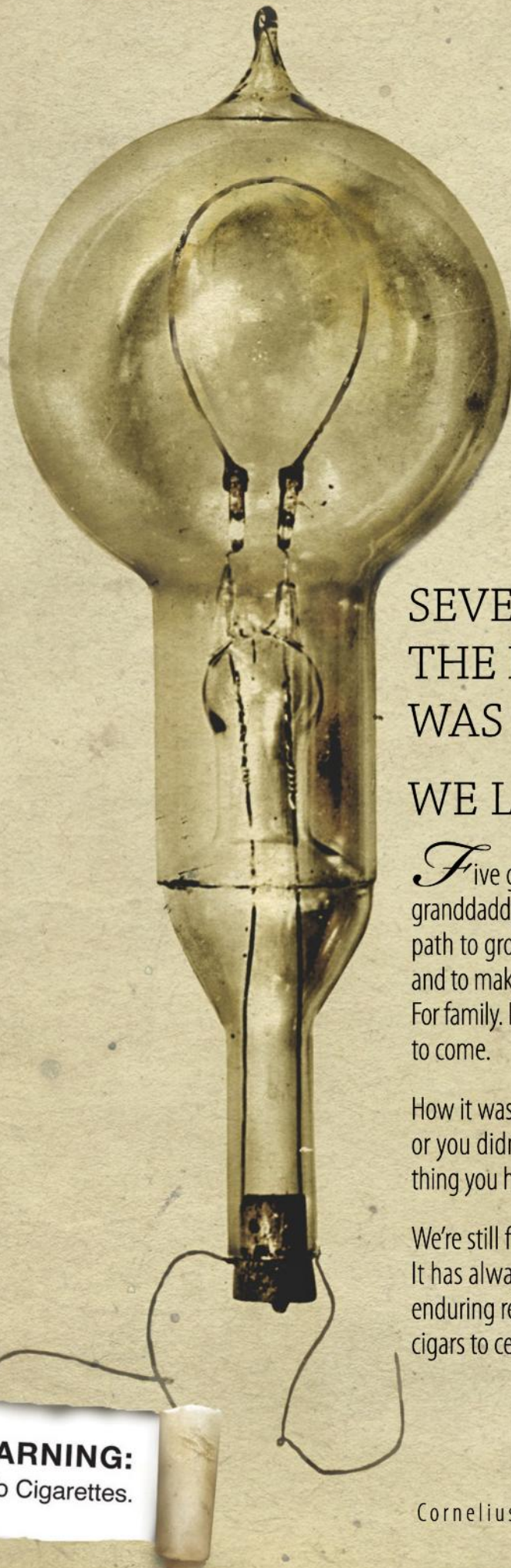
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Lexus LC500

For some folks, a day in paradise means soaking up the Hawaiian sun. For us, it's about climbing behind the wheel of the new Lexus LC500 and heading off to explore the hidden corners of the Big Island.

Since Toyota launched its luxury brand nearly three decades ago, Lexus has built a reputation for delivering quiet, lavishly equipped cars with bulletproof reliability. Where those products have fallen short is in the passion quotient. But if the LC500 is any indication, that's about to change. "I never want to hear the words, 'boring' and 'Lexus,' in the same sentence ever again," proclaimed Toyota Motor Co. CEO Akio Toyoda, as he pulled the wraps off the new sports coupe at the Detroit Auto Show. One glimpse suggests the grandson of Toyota's founder will get his wish.

Originally introduced as the LF-LC concept, few observers expected Lexus would follow up with a production model—or, if it did, that it would retain the show car's defining creases and curves. The LC takes the distinctive, if controversial, "spindle grille" that we've seen on other recent Lexus products to a new level of bold. But the aggressive face, with its slit headlights and impossibly long hood, fits this luxury coupe. The overall look is menacing yet sophisticated: a gangster in an evening jacket.

But what really matters is what we discover as we fire up the LC500's 5.0-liter engine. It's classic muscle, no slick turbos or superchargers, just a big V-8 making 471 horsepower and 398 pound-feet of torque. That's enough to snap your neck and let you sink deep into your seat as you launch down Queen Ka'ahumanu Highway—which the locals call "Crazy

K." All the more satisfying is that deep, resonant roar blasting out of the tailpipe. Other Lexus models may be tombstone quiet, but the LC500 warns you it's coming and tells you to get out of the way.

Most of the roads on the Big Island are, to be honest, as boring as classic Lexus design. But we've spent enough time to learn where the twisty bits are found, like Hawaii 250, which winds through the volcanic hills from Waimea to the coast. And the LC500 doesn't disappoint, connecting us to the road and urging us to take each new corner just a little bit faster.

After a long morning adventure, we return to our base and snag the keys to another coupe, this one adding the letter "h" to its nameplate. The hybrid brings together an intriguing powertrain package combining a 3.5-liter V-6 and an electric motor drawing power from a lithium-ion battery. It manages to deliver "only" 354 hp, yet it loses only about 0.2 seconds off the conventional gas model's 0 to 60 times of 4.7 seconds. The only minor disappointment with the LC500h? It delivers more of a whine than a roar out of the tailpipe—though it does yield notably better mileage.

For those who think of Lexus as the boring car your accountant drives, the new LC500 (and hybrid 500h) will quickly change your perceptions, whether you're off for a day's drive in paradise or someplace closer to home. Pricing starts at around \$95,000 for the Lexus LC500 and \$100,000 for the LC500h.

Visit lexus.com

—Paul A. Eisenstein

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Boston Harbor Hotel

At very few urban hotels can a visitor arrive by boat. Take the water taxi from Logan Airport to Boston Harbor Hotel, however, and you put your flight behind en route to the private dock of one of the best locations in the city. Within walking distance are Faneuil Hall, the Aquarium, the Italian North End and the new Boston Public Market. But at this luxury gem, one of the nation's best, the prime location is just the tip of a stellar experience.

Even if you prefer a five-minute cab ride, The Boston Harbor Hotel has been one of the finest—and most overlooked—luxury properties in the Northeast for years. Boston Harbor is the city's only independent Forbes 5-Star, and as such, it always tries harder. It could not be rated any higher, yet owners just undertook a comprehensive renovation anyway that remade all 230 rooms and suites (starting at \$589). The smallest layout, a “Harbor Superior,” provides exquisite waterfront views and a generous use of space that extends to the bathrooms, with their huge walk-in showers. The restaurants were remodeled, the large spa and health club updated and one of the most user-friendly in-room technology systems in the hospitality industry installed. Yet the premium is still on human interaction. After your first visit, everyone remembers your name and it always feels like coming home.

Something fun always seems to be going on at Boston Harbor Hotel.



In summer, outdoor movies are played on the waterfront terrace, while a historic schooner offers dinner cruises and private charters. In winter, the Sea Grill restaurant takes on an après ski motif with a fire pit, s'mores and fondue. A pop-up high-end whiskey bar also makes frequent appearances. From January through March, the 4-Star fine dining Meritage restaurant hosts the nation's longest running wine festival. The Boston Wine Festival is a 10-week series of intimate special gatherings, nearly three dozen, mostly sit-down, winemaker-hosted, multicourse pairing dinners featuring an all-star lineup including luminaries such as Opus One and Trimbach. When the festival is not in town, oenophile guests can still enjoy the 1,400 labels and wine-centric menu approach of longtime Chef Daniel Bruce.

Boston Harbor Hotel is like peeling an especially fragrant onion, with layers of little touches that add up to a memorable stay. The hotel is dog friendly, a chauffeured house car is available and the bathrooms feature bespoke toiletries. Even the postcards in guest room desks are custom made by local artists—all as part of a truly one-of-a-kind experience.

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—Larry Olmsted



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The Blue Blazer

Sartorial quiz: If a man has but one jacket to pack for a summer weekend, what is it? The answer—the standard blue blazer with its casual, but regimented look—while kind of obvious, shouldn't be taken to mean that there isn't any room to spiff up a part of your wardrobe that you might have dismissed as basic.

Don't worry. We're not suggesting a color change. Blue may not define a blazer, but it is a fairly safe bet. By the original definition, the jacket can come in any color or stripe. In fact, all the blazing, multicolored coats with awning stripes and fat piping that the Brits trot out at the Henley Regatta every year are how the blazer supposedly got its name. (A competing theory is associated to the uniform of a British warship named *HMS Blazer*.) Nevertheless, the garment, as we know it stateside, is decidedly tame in color and pattern. And that's the point. Dandies can wear their Henley jackets once a year to watch a rarified sport. You can wear your blue blazer almost anytime and anywhere. With the exception of formal events and biker bars it is a welcome uniform almost everywhere, including ball games, golf outings, dinner parties and keggers. And it pairs with everything from a necktie and handkerchief to a tee shirt.

But if you're limping along with the same poplin blend jacket with brass buttons that you've worn for years, it's time for an upgrade. Jack Simpson, the always-debonair purveyor of his self-titled, custom-couture line, suggests starting with the fabric. No reason to sport a rough-hewn cloth she might cut her hand on while dancing with you, when you might have his jacket (pictured here) in a soft, luxuriantly draping Escorial wool fabric. For that matter, the coat from a casual mohair suit with patch pockets can be called into service. Next, swap those brass fasteners with horn or pearl buttons. (After all, clunky brass ones were first meant to keep sailors from wiping their noses with their sleeves.) Then rethink the pocket emblem—unless you actually belong to a yacht club.

From there, consider the very elements that make Simpson's styles look so sharp—and the basic blue blazer seem so, well, basic: fit and cut.



Boating jackets may traditionally have been fitted loose—but so what? A boxy cut with notched collar puts you in a box. A long, sinuous shape with peaked lapels (which are typical to a double-breasted coat) confers the two things most men want: height and slimness. Talk about looking shipshape.

Visit jacksimpsoncouture.com

—Jack Bettridge



The Customized Gin & Tonic

Blame it on science. When cures for malaria came along, the point of adding tonic to gin was no longer the big blast of quinine that treated, but didn't heal, the symptoms of the disease. It became a simple drink mixer, so bottlers started backing off the bitter alkaloid made from cinchona bark and emphasized the sweetness that the mass market seems to crave. But for those seeking authentic tonic to mix with their gin (see story page 89), the cocktail revival has brought retro quinine waters like Fever-Tree, Q, Fentimans, Stirrings and Jack Rudy, (a syrup to which you add seltzer to taste). The most intrepid will conjure custom quinine tonic to match their taste.

At its simplest it's not hard, although it takes planning ahead and experimentation. Of course, you'll want to source natural ingredients. Combine four cups water and three cups cane sugar in a sauce pan and bring to a boil. Set on low. Add three tablespoons powdered cinchona bark (search the Internet), a quarter cup citric acid, three stalks of chopped lemongrass and the zest of a lemon or lime. Stir and let simmer for a half hour. Cool and strain through a coffee filter. (You may want to do this several times for aesthetic purposes: cinchona tints the mixture bronze, quite unlike the gin and tonic in the photo.) You will end up with a quinine tonic syrup, which will keep up to a month in a glass container. To serve, mix a tablespoon with gin in a glass and add ice and seltzer to taste.

Some on a quinine quest have been known to take it to extremes, however—as does Robby Younes, wine director at Crystal Springs Resort, in Hamburg, New Jersey. As well as wine, he enthuses over gin. He's tried 300 and is at work on his own concoction. Younes makes three different tonics intended for spring (honey emphasis), summer (floral) and fall/winter (juniper). And he goes to the ends of the earth to source components. A typical recipe starts in France with Vittel water. For cinchona, he looks to northern Peru, but, as a cigar smoker, Younes grinds it himself from the tree bark and then gently barbecues it with the cedar used to wrap cigars. His citric acid comes from Israel, and he adds cardamom seeds from Lebanon. Thailand supplies his lemongrass. For zest, he goes to Mexico for limes, lemons and grapefruits. Many hobbyists use allspice berries. Younes' come from the west (not the east, thank you) of India. In summer, he might add lavender from the south of France. The juniper, for his winter mix, comes from perhaps the most esoteric locale of all: a bush growing near the parking lot of his local Starbucks. Try finding that one on the Internet.

—Jack Bettridge



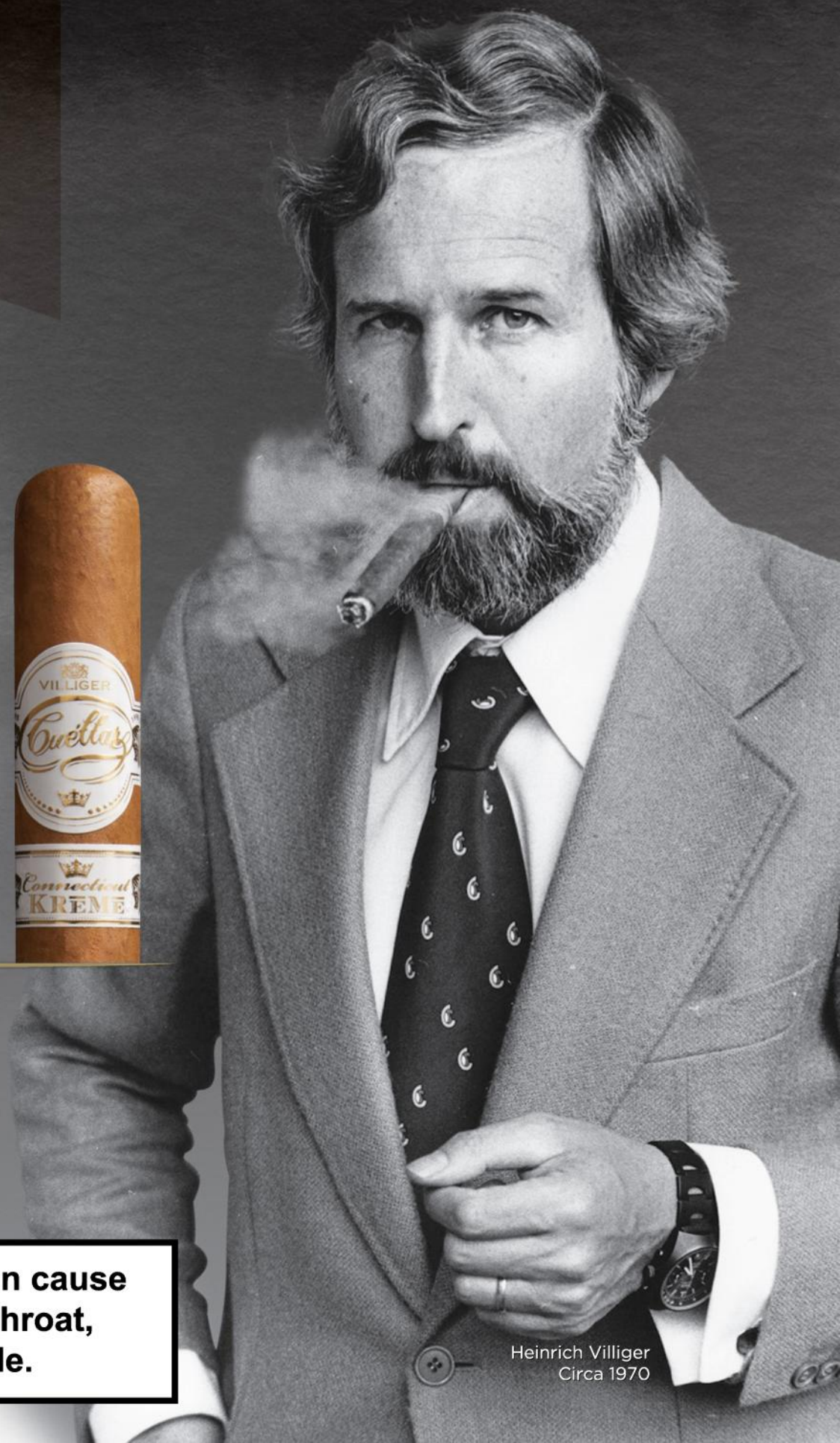
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Sailing Watches

Sailing enthusiasts turned their attention to Bermuda in June, when the sport's fiercest competitors and fastest vessels vied to take home sporting's oldest trophy as the victor of the 35th America's Cup match. Meanwhile, watch brands got into the spirit with sporty new nautical designs geared for mariners and landlubbers alike.

Panerai made a big America's Cup splash by taking over as the event's official watch sponsor, in addition to partnering with the defending Oracle Team USA and challenger Softbank Team Japan. The development resulted from a conversation between Panerai CEO Angelo Bonati and his friend America's Cup CEO Russell Coutts. Until then, Panerai concentrated on classic sailing regattas featuring vintage sailboats. The dramatic move lifted the brand to the sport's equivalent of Formula One.

The new partnership comprises five special-edition watches, including a 47-mm Luminor 1950 Regatta Oracle Team USA 3 Days Chrono Flyback Automatic (\$15,300, left, in black ceramic; \$17,900 in titanium). The flyback chronograph used for timing will stop the elapsing seconds hand and instantly return it to zero to begin timing a second event without first stopping the chronograph. The regatta countdown function ticks down a 15-minute interval before competitors are allowed to cross the start line, with the final five-minute scale in red. A tachymeter scale around the flange calculates speed in knots.

Ulysse Nardin, sponsor of the Swedish Artemis Racing team, also has a new regatta watch with a sweep countdown timer at the center of the dial that can be set for between one and 10 minutes. The bidirectional seconds hand moves counterclockwise as it ticks down to the start, and then instantly changes direction to start timing the race with elapsed time tracked on a sub-dial at 6 o'clock. Ulysse Nardin developed the patent-pending movement with input from renowned yachtsmen Loïck Peyron and Iain Percy, brand ambassadors and Artemis Racing team members. The Marine Regatta comes with a white or blue lacquered dial (\$15,900, center), while a limited-edition Artemis Racing version features a special champlevé enamel dial (\$29,800).

Louis Vuitton, which is the race's title partner, developed an America's Cup fashion collection that includes a colorful red, white and blue Tambour Navy Chronograph (\$6,800). The jaunty design subtly features the tricolor Gaston V—a century-old insignia used by Gaston-Louis Vuitton that also appears in the new America's Cup logo—at 12 o'clock on the dial and on the Damier Cobalt canvas strap. With its rounded drum-like case the eye-catching 46-mm stainless steel Tambour looks shipshape even if you are only navigating city streets this summer.

Visit panerai.com, ulysses-nardin.com, louisvuitton.com

—Laurie Kahle



Titleist 917D2 Driver

You've heard the saying a thousand times on the course: drive for show, putt for dough. Leave the big dog in the bag and worry about 100 yards and in.

But where's the fun in that?

If you're like me, you want to murder the tee shot. No one likes to be outdriven or to hear the inevitable barbs from your golfing buddies that follow. (My brother uncorked this gem a season or so ago: "My ball took a photo of your ball when it flew over.")

Hitting the big stick well starts with the right driver. Pro and amateur alike have embraced the Titleist 917D2. Promoting distance with forgiveness, the \$550 club has a massive sweet spot and considerable adjustability. The 917D2 also has an active recoil channel—a canyon of sorts that runs across the entire sole allowing the face of the driver to compress at impact and bounce back, boosting ball speed and cutting spin to increase distance. It's the most forgiving of the company's 917 series of drivers.

If you buy a Titleist driver, don't buy one off the rack. You can be custom-fit at one of thousands of fitting centers around the world. Most shops include the fitting fee in the price, and Titleist itself offers complimentary fittings at Titleist Thursday locations.

You step up to the range with a Titleist team member and take a few warm-up swings. After answering some questions about your game (your handicap, typical ball flight, common problems you face) you try a driver. A TrackMan launch monitoring system

analyzes your swing speed, spin rate, ball flight and a host of other factors, and the fitter makes adjustments, perhaps changing the shaft, the loft or shaft angle. What may seem like small changes on paper result in real changes in the flight of a ball, and you'll watch as low shots are replaced by high shots and pulls and pushes are replaced by straighter, truer drives. The entire process takes 20 or 30 minutes.

You can still make further adjustments at home using the wrench and weights that come with the club, including changes to the loft, lie and head weight. Even if you think the only cure for your game is a sprinkling of holy water and a switch to tennis, you should notice a difference.

No club will make you hit the ball like a Justin Thomas, who swings the club to great effect (see the June CIGAR AFICIONADO). But dialing in a 917D2 to your own personal specs should certainly help your game.

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—David Savona

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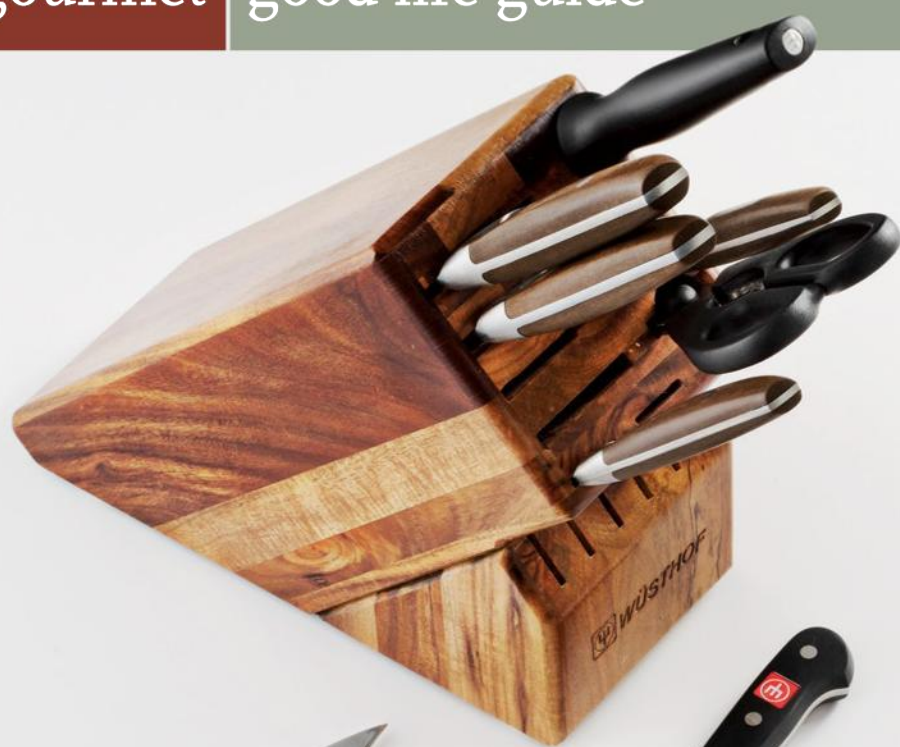
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Kitchen Knives

If men involve themselves in culinary purchases it is usually with huge outdoor barbecues meant to instill grill envy in their neighbors or cast-iron, gas-driven ranges that lend the kitchen a gnarly motif. What you're probably ignoring is a pursuit that is just as masculine and involves diverse choices that are sure to improve your cooking skills: proper cutlery. After all, it's not worth taking the chance of ruining a prized piece of beef (or your fingers) by using a dull knife, or worse, the wrong one for the job.

Since 1814, family-owned Wüsthof has been crafting fine knives in Solingen, Germany, also known as the "City of Blades," where the art of blade-making is taken so seriously that it's been protected through legislation. Each blade that the company produces has been honed through a proprietary process called Precision Edge Technology that not only creates a sharper edge, but also doubles its retention and optimizes overall balance.

Wüsthof's Epicure seven-piece block set (top, \$500), which comes with a 3 1/2-inch paring knife, a 5-inch serrated utility knife, an 8-inch cook's knife, a 9-inch double-serrated bread knife, steel sharpener, shears, and a 17-slot storage block, is just a starting point. Each of the knives sport shaped handles made of Richlite, a composite of recycled wood fiber materials, that have been riveted through the blade. This boosts comfort and aids the cutting motion, and the set will cover all of your basic chopping, mincing, paring and slicing needs.

You'll want to take it to the next level, however. Check out the 10-inch Pro cimeter knife (center left, \$55), which features a curved blade to help smoothly saw through animal skin and produce thin slices of meat. The Ikon 5-inch boning knife (\$160) is ideal for removing bones in pork, beef or chicken, while the flexible, narrow blade of the Ikon 6-inch Fillet knife (\$190) helps separate fish flesh from the skin.

Your cutting arsenal can also be improved with the purchase of the 7-inch Chinese cleaver (center right, \$190) that makes chopping fresh herbs and vegetables a breeze, and the 7-inch Santoku knife (bottom left, \$190), which features small indentations on the blade so starchy foods like potatoes don't stick. And if you're feeling saucy, the 5-inch tomato knife (bottom right, \$85) is perfect for slicing the delicate fruit as well as citrus.

To improve your skills and learn how to properly care for your new toys, be sure to view Wüsthof's Knife Skills Academy videos on their website, and soon you'll be crafting home-cooked meals that are of restaurant quality. Or at least you'll have fun trying.

Visit wusthof.com.

—Andrew Nagy

JEFF HARRIS



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Baseball is Back

Two tenets of collecting that seem axiomatic are that it's always wise to invest in that which is timeless and that men of all ages will collect baseball cards. That second notion was challenged a few decades ago when two natural enemies whipsawed the category. Cards—and, later, autographed pictures and balls—were all the rage for collectors, when so many companies were producing cards that the market was oversaturated. Supply outstripped demand and the cards' value plummeted. And for autographs the buzz became the “F” word: fraud. It emerged on a grand scale, as the FBI estimated that 90 percent of the autograph market in the 1990s was bogus. We adored those looping “Ms” in Mickey Mantle’s signature, but they were easy for an imitator to copy.

But for those who stuck by the timeless premise baseball is still the leading sports collectible. Many vintage items that had value decades ago retain value today, and will maintain their worth a half a century from now. “The market is heavily geared toward baseball,” says Chris Ivy, director of the sports category for Heritage Auctions, an online auction firm. “Baseball has the longest history, and it is the most collected sport.”

Indeed, a Heritage online auction last May featured Hall of Famers Cap Anson, Timothy Keefe, and Ed Delahanty in 1887 baseball cards. Later cards, from 1902 through 1911, included Napoleon Lajoie, Eddie Plank and

Honus Wagner. The prices ranged “affordably” from \$400 to \$27,000. But as excellent as such items are, they are nowhere near the high end.

“Of baseball [collectibles], the Yankees have a good portion of that—the most dominant team, the most collected team and with the richest history,” Ivy says. The prices prove it.

Of the 10 most expensive items belonging to individual baseball players sold at auction from 2010 through 2016, eight of those belonged to the Yankees. They included a 1952 Topps Mickey Mantle card in mint condition which fetched a staggering \$1,135,250 in November 2016. A 1927 home jersey worn by Lou Gehrig went for \$717,000. And the bat that Babe Ruth used to hit his then-record 59th homer in 1921 sold for \$717,000, the same price as his 1916 card, when he was pitching for the rival Boston Red Sox.

The Yankees aside, vintage items abound elsewhere. The boxing gloves used in the 1965 “phantom punch” bout between Muhammad Ali and Sonny Liston sold for \$956,000 in 2015. A year later, Honus Wagner’s T-206 card made \$776,750.

As with immortal players, the finest collectibles stand the test of time. Visit ha.com

—Kenneth Shouler



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She's Worth Billions

*“Billions” star Maggie Siff
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T

HEY PLAY HUSBAND AND WIFE on Showtime's "Billions," but one of the first scenes Paul Giamatti filmed with actress Maggie Siff was far from your usual get-to-know-you moment. • She towered over him in dominatrix gear, including thigh-high leather boots, as he lay trussed up and gagged at her feet. She demeaned him verbally, just before slowly grinding a glowing cigarette out on his chest. The next scene: The two of them, dressed for work and smiling, giving their kids breakfast and getting them off to school.

"Maggie was one of those people I instantly felt comfortable with," Giamatti says with a laugh. "We had fun doing that scene. That kind of trust comes from being a decent, kind, lovely, warm person. We were both very curious about that world and talked to some people who are in it as research. That's one of the fun extracurricular bonuses of being an actor—you get to learn about these other lives.

"What made it comfortable is that Maggie is a great actress. There are times I watch her and I think, 'If I could grow up and be you as an actor, that would be amazing.' I'm amazed by how good she is."

Sitting on a restaurant patio in Los Angeles' Los Feliz neighborhood (not far from her home in Silver Lake), Siff chuckles at a mention of that moment, the attention-grabbing first scene in the pilot for the 2016 series.

"Paul and I got through the awkwardness together," she says. It's clear that she approaches that particular kink in her character, psychotherapist Wendy Rhoades, quite seriously. "For Wendy, I think it's something she allowed into the marriage because he needed it." Siff adds with a grin: "And she ends up being good at it."

You play to your strengths and Siff, a Bronx Science graduate, has built an increasingly noticeable career playing strong, smart women who make their mark in a world of powerful men. From "Mad Men" to "Sons of Anarchy" and now "Billions," Siff has been at the center of some of

television's most arresting dramas for the past decade.

"There's a pleasure in swimming with sharks," she says.

She smiles, her green eyes offering a warmth and humor that can turn to chilly intelligence in front of a camera. In the 10 years since Siff got under Don Draper's skin in the very first episode of "Mad Men," she's created a series of characters who blend brains, toughness and vulnerability in a seductive and refreshing way.

"The strength, the confidence, the intelligence, the beauty—you're intrigued as soon as she walks on-screen," says Matthew Weiner, the creator of "Mad Men."

In the high-testosterone, male-ego-driven world of politics and finance depicted in "Billions," the sharpest operator and canniest player swimming among those sharks may just be Siff as Wendy Rhoades, the woman in the middle. Like so many professional people, Wendy confronts the familiar contemporary conflict—career vs. family—with a twist: Her husband and her boss hate each other.

Actually, hate is too mild: They're mortal enemies.

Her boss is a hedge-fund titan, the rule-skirting Bobby Axelrod, known as "Axe," played by Damian Lewis. His Axe Capital employs her as an in-house psychotherapist/performance coach for his team of testosterone-laden traders. But her husband is U.S. Attorney Chuck Rhoades

(Giamatti), whose greater political ambitions rest on indicting Axelrod for insider trading and other financial chicanery. It's business, but it's also increasingly personal.

The in-fighting got increasingly brutal in the series' second season, as Rhoades faced scrutiny that nearly cost him his job before reversing his fortunes to become a serious candidate for governor of New York. But Axelrod, who prides himself on his outlaw instincts, chafed at the effort to appear squeaky clean, even as he began to doubt Wendy's loyalty for the first time—despite the fact that she's separated from Chuck and going through marital counseling.



Maggie Siff is the third actor from "Billions" on the cover, joining Paul Giamatti (far left) and Damian Lewis.



The show “Billions” pits the Axelrod family, left, played by Malin Akerman and Damian Lewis, in a battle over money and loyalty with the family Rhoades, portrayed by Maggie Siff and Paul Giamatti.

It all came to a climax in the second season’s final episodes. Axelrod bent the law in an effort to bankrupt Chuck and his father, even as Chuck committed transgressions of his own to ensnare Axelrod. The season ended with Axelrod arrested, freed on bail and facing off with Rhoades, who tells his nemesis that, no matter what the cost to himself, if he can bring Axelrod down, it will be “worth it.”

Siff plays Wendy as the only one capable of surfing the big waves created when these two huge egos clash. Axe is her boss, but she’s also his therapist. Chuck is her husband, but their personal life also includes a bondage-and-domination element that makes him the submissive to her dominant. It’s the kind of acting challenge that Siff relishes: The push/pull within each relationship, she says, is what makes the role so interesting.

“You don’t have to put a gun to Wendy’s head for her to choose her family over her job,” Siff says. “But I do think she’s susceptible. She’s not immune to being seduced by the world of wealth and power. It’s just that she’s a more well-rounded character, because of her intensive training. In some ways, this show is about what happens when you ignore the things that keep you connected to the world. She watches Axe and sees what happens to him when he disassociates from ‘higher values.’ That can be a deadly sacrifice. She has the capacity not to make that kind of Sophie’s choice.”

Siff came to “Billions” at a point when being a mom seemed a lot more

“The script for ‘Billions’ called to me; it woke me up to want to do it. It felt like a gift.”

important than being an actor. She’d finished six seasons of “Sons of Anarchy,” playing Dr. Tara Knowles, a surgeon whose career is compromised by her romantic involvement with the leader of a Bay Area biker gang. At the end of her final season Siff was pregnant, and gave birth to daughter Lucy in 2014. At that point, she felt blissfully cocooned in the baby bubble.

“Having a family changed some of my fixation on my career and naturally shifted my priorities,” Siff, 42, says. “After I had my child, I couldn’t imagine ever wanting to leave her. All that artifice of putting on costumes and make-up felt very far away. I was so hunkered down with my daughter in the act of nesting and turning inward—I couldn’t imagine leaving the house and spending time away from her.”

It was “Billions” that brought her back to acting. “The script for ‘Billions’ was the first one I read that got my juices going, that I felt myself interested in. It called to me; it woke me up to want to do it. It felt like a gift, something that made me feel that excited.”

Executive producers Brian Koppelman and David Levien, cocreators of the Showtime series with Andrew Ross Sorkin, were equally excited

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when Siff decided to audition. They had struggled to cast the role of Wendy, trying out nearly 100 actresses without finding one “who seemed to nail it,” Koppelman says.

“We were looking at casting tapes on a Sunday night, each of us at home, and here was this tape of Maggie, sitting in a chair in her living room, saying the words of a scene where she’s giving a pep talk to a trader,” Koppelman recalls. “There was an intelligence in her eyes, an incredible amount of empathy, and this clear understanding of every nuance and human shading and thought that the character had. It was one of the most compelling auditions I’d ever seen. I called David and said, ‘Are you watching Maggie Siff?’ And he was.”

“It was the most obvious thing in the world,” says Levien. “We had read so many people for the role, and she was obviously the only one for the part.”

Giamatti agrees. “On the page initially, the character seemed like she’d be steely. But Maggie brought more warmth and humanity to it. She made it an even more complicated character. Wendy moves between those worlds, studying power.”

Though “Billions” seems like a straightforward power struggle between two men on a collision course, the character of Wendy shifts the balance of power dramatically, sometimes to herself. Better than either of them, Wendy, a psychotherapist, knows what makes these two rivals tick.

“I’m a quiet, introverted person naturally,” Siff says. “I’m introspective, thinking about people’s motives. If I wasn’t an actor, I might be a therapist. But Wendy is a lot smarter than I am. All of these characters are incredibly competitive and interested in being king—or queen—of their realm. There’s this fixation on mastery.”

“Wendy is really comfortable with the male ego structure. She understands it, she enjoys it, she appreciates the fierce competitive nature of the work environment, of her husband and her boss. Wendy, like Rachel Menken [her “Mad Men” character], relishes her role. She’s unafraid to stand up in a man’s world,” says Siff. “Wendy is just fucking good at her job, at doing the work and living the life. She doesn’t feel guilt; she doesn’t have to apologize for throwing elbows. She’s graceful.”

“We joke that everybody talks about this as a male, testosterone-driven show,” says Levien, “But we knew the secret—that Wendy would win the first season.”



Season Two of “Billions” saw Siff continue her role advising Axe Capital’s crew, including Mike Wagner (David Costabile, above) and Taylor (Asia Kate Dillon, top left, with Damian Lewis). But her toughest battles came at home, facing her on-screen husband played by Giamatti.

“That’s what’s so fun about the show, the power switches off between them,” Koppelman says. “Sure, with Axe and Wendy, one of them is the boss. But, in any given moment, anyone can take the power, depending on who needs what from whom. She’s able to read people and understands all the levers there are, how they move. Essentially, who’s zooming who.”

That type of situation is one Siff relishes. “I do enjoy playing characters who can stand up in those supercharged worlds and be heard. Wendy is a change-agent for herself and the people around her. Everybody has blinders on about themselves, but her gift is to see through other people’s facades. She’s a great manipulator, and she mostly uses it for good.”

Wendy Rhoades is one in a decade-long series of TV characters with whom Siff has made her mark. From her breakthrough as department-store heiress Rachel Menken on “Mad Men” in 2007 to Tara Knowles on “Sons of Anarchy” (2008–13) and now with “Billions,” she’s played astute, perceptive women, which means they were casting to type. Siff, after all, was canny enough to follow her mother’s advice and attend Bronx High School of



Siff's breakout came in Season One of "Mad Men," with Jon Hamm.

Science, instead of the High School of the Performing Arts in Manhattan.

"Really, my mother made me go there. I actually got into both Science and Performing Arts," Siff recalls. "But my mother pushed me in the direction of Science High. She said, 'Get the best education you can get.' I felt like there would be time to do acting and theater after high school. As a kid, I cared most about being smart and doing well.

"Some part of me knew that from the time I was a kid. So, in high school, I participated in speech and debate. I did dramatic interpretation and rode the bus to the tournaments with all the policy nerds who were debating. But I was also acting; Regis High School was this all-boys school in Manhattan and I got recruited to take the subway into Manhattan to play women in their plays.

"I probably should have started this whole process of an acting career when I was a lot younger. But I wasn't thinking ahead about how that was going to happen, or what I wanted my career to look like. When I would think about the future, all I could see was a big gray wall. I thought, well, shouldn't I be able to see something more? I cared about my education and I liked school. So I prioritized that."

Siff went to Bryn Mawr College, which led to work with professional theater companies in Philadelphia, where she acted during college and for five years after she graduated.

"I was working a lot, but I had this constant feeling of self-criticism. I was really hard on myself," she says. "I wasn't growing in the way I wanted. I was doing a lot of avant-garde, site-specific work and, if that's what you want to do, Philadelphia was a great place.

"But I felt called to explore characters and felt like I needed formal training. So I applied to NYU for graduate school and got in. And by the time I got out, I was 30. You could say I came to Hollywood late, but those three years at NYU gave me a chance to regain the sense of what makes me want to act. It restored my faith and conviction in the craft. It grew me in a way that was incredibly helpful, in terms of sustaining a

career over time. It was a way of learning to trust your own instincts and get out of your own way."

As she talks about working in New York theater, the subject of cigars arises, because one of her favorite directors, Oskar Eustis, artistic director of the Public Theater, used to use rehearsal breaks to enjoy fine tobacco.

"He'd run outside to smoke his cigar, then stash the butt for the next break," she recalls with a laugh. "He had a special spot where he'd stash his cigars and you always knew you'd find him there.

"Actually, he's one of three guys I've worked with who are great smokers. Beside Oskar, there was Ron Perlman and Peter Weller... All of these men are very outsized characters, with charismatic, smart, very big personalities. They're people who are unashamed to smoke a cigar in public. The cigars felt like an extension of the *joie de vivre* they all possess. It's kind of a trope: this very old-boy, rarefied men's club. For these guys, it's definitely an extension of a certain kind of machismo."

After grad school, Siff did plays in Chicago, then took aim at Hollywood and, after two years of TV guest spots (including a couple of three-episode arcs on "Nip/Tuck" and "Life on Mars"), she got a call from a casting agent to read for the pilot of a new series: "Mad Men."

"I thought it was brilliant when I read it," she recalls. "I'd been auditioning all winter for pilot season. The year before, I'd tested for a bunch of pilots and didn't even get a nibble. It was the last script I read for the pilot season. And I stuck my claws out for this one.

"Originally, I was supposed to read for the character of Peggy Olson [which went to Elisabeth Moss], but my manager said, 'I don't think you're Peggy. You're Rachel.' So that's what I read for. They kept calling me back. Matt [Weiner] had so much specificity about who the characters were and who to cast. I wound up reading for him five times. Every time I went in, I'd think, 'This is mine,' and then I wouldn't get it. My manager and agent were trying to prepare me, saying, 'They're probably going to go another way,' but I wasn't giving up. It happens so rarely where you're really convinced that something is coming to you."

"I wanted someone who had that slight New York vibe," Weiner remembers. "I wanted a little bit of a city edge, but also an assimilated quality. And then we found Maggie—she was so beautiful and she did it so many different ways."

More important, her Rachel Menken clicked with Jon Hamm's Don Draper, in a subplot of marital infidelity and romance that became a central conflict of the first season of "Mad Men."

"There was incredible romantic chemistry," Weiner notes. "You can't plan for it but it really did happen in this case. There was a tinge of vulnerability under her strength that made her seem susceptible to Don. I loved her dry sense of humor. She has an elegance that comes from education, but there's also a toughness. She's so strong, but she's also really feminine. She's a real person, not someone who's putting on a front. There's something amazing about someone who can convincingly let a character's intelligence come through. And there's a conflict when that person makes a bad decision—about Don, for example—that's really dramatic."

It was a year between shooting the pilot and the series going on the air, and then, Siff wasn't sure if the show had a future.

"It was like an art project," Siff says. "In fact, I remember an AMC executive using that term: that the show was like an art project, that it would give the network credibility even if nobody watched it. Nobody had any idea it would do what it did." The show went on for seven seasons, and won a host of Emmys, Golden Globe and SAG awards.

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Siff's character was written out after the first season of "Mad Men," but she segued directly to "Sons of Anarchy." She spent six seasons playing Dr. Tara Knowles in the series about a motorcycle gang that was sometimes described as "Hamlet on Harleys." Among other things, she got to ride on the back of several motorcycles and acted out a brutally violent final scene in a fight with Katey Sagal.

"Every character in that show was in a constant state of managing their PTSD," says Siff. "I did a lot of things on that show that I'd never done before; the thing that was so breathtaking was the violence. Whenever I had one of those scenes and I'd come home covered in fake blood or I'd killed someone, I'd think, 'I can't believe this is my job.'"

"She's a great, great girl who hasn't been affected by all the Hollywood rah-rah," Sagal says. "She's very down-to-earth and

"I need to work for my well-being. Every job has to call to me in a deep way to feel we'll all be served."

sincere. She comes from a theater background, so she upped my game. You want to work with actors who are better than you—and she was very good at what she does."

Tara's murder provides an emotional climax to the sixth season of "Sons." She was killed in a particularly gruesome scene: smashed in the head with an iron, then drowned in a sink of ice water while Sagal's character also stabbed her repeatedly in the back with a carving fork.

"That was kind of traumatic," Siff recalls with a laugh. "This was not an ordinary death. On one level, I was glad it was so spectacular because it means you meant something to the show. It was kind of surreal, because we had stunt doubles; Katey and I were taught the fight and we would jump in and out for close-ups. But you're also watching your double enact it at full-speed. It's a long, bloody process. My mother and sister couldn't watch that episode.

"It's intense to live with those characters for that many years and then have to say goodbye. On a practical level, you're cold and wet and covered in fake blood, and that goes on all day. Then for the two days afterward, I had to lie on the floor as a dead body and watch the rest of the characters deal with my death. I still have 'Sons of Anarchy' dreams. It lodges in your psyche. It doesn't die."

Sitting on the patio in Los Angeles, Siff is in a rare quiet moment. She will shoot an independent film in Kentucky before returning to shoot Season 3 of "Billions" after Labor Day. In between is family vacation and spending time with her husband, design consultant Paul Ratliff, and their daughter, Lucy. Siff and Ratliff have been married since 2012, and their child turned three in April.

For the moment, Siff's schedule accommodates her needs as a mother. She hopes to work theater back into the mix, and she realizes that acting is important not only for her, but for her daughter as well.



"I need to work for my well-being, as well as hers," she says. "If I'm not really digging in to express myself in that way, I start feeling a little crazy and that's not good for her. So I'm trying to find the balance. The calculus is more complicated than it used to be, when my romantic relationship and my career filled up my time. That was easier math to do than being a good mom who's really present.

"This year I said no to things that I'd have said yes to before I had a child. At this point, every job has to call to me in a deep way to feel we'll all be served. And I don't regret that for a moment." ❖

Contributing editor Marshall Fine is critic-in-residence at The Picture House Regional Film Center in Pelham, NY.



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*Since he was a young boy,
Jim Rome has been
fascinated with sports,
and he has been the
ruling voice on the subject
for decades // BY JOEL DRUCKER*

Picture a driver, his car on a highway. There's traffic. Movement. Slower. Faster. Clutter on the right. Construction up ahead on the left. He's got the radio on, listening to *The Voice*, a sound he's heard for more than 20 years. That game last night was amazing. Will the team make the trade? Should a new coach be hired? Can you believe that guy missed that putt? And what about the next game?

The driver enjoys what he hears. It's like he's listening to a conversation inside a bar, on a playground, outdoors on his buddy's deck. Here's one caller, saying why the coach is a bum. Here's another, dead certain the general manager was the bad guy. Though the next caller takes it in a whole other direction—he wants to repeal the DH rule—the randomness of it all suits the driver just fine. This is what it was like when sports were affordable and accessible and you got into it with people in the nearby seats. Even if he disagrees sometimes, it's all fun: fast, vocal, passionate, combative.

Reigning over all of it is *The Voice*. The cadence like none other. The snap. The crackle. The pop. Confident. Staccato. Crunch, crunch, crunch. Relentlessly engaged, as if this broadcast could well be his last. As the host sees it, the people who've chosen to hear him have made a choice. Whether they are listening in traffic, on the job, at work, in a bar, in the middle of exercise, whatever the flip, they are here not just on the sidelines, but in the game. Even if they don't call in, they are participating with the heart and mind so unique to a sports zealot. *The Voice* knows this. He doesn't just understand his audience with studied distance and a glance at some horizontal Excel document. He is the audience, has been one of them since he was a kid, grasps what's needed not just in his head but in his bones. It's downright visceral. So the show—any show, every damn show—better be memorable.

The Voice belongs to Jim Rome. Every weekday, from a Southern California studio a short drive away from his home in Orange County, the 52-year-old plays the role of ringleader of “*The Jim Rome Show*,” a CBS Sports Radio program that airs on 205 stations across America, as well as on the Internet. Ninety-one percent of the audience is male. It's a three-hour program, which means Rome's workday starts before dawn as he and his team review and assemble the show. The evenings are often taken up tracking games, trades, news and all else that define America's endless appetite for sports. Much as Rome relishes those off-hours moments when he can retreat to his backyard and enjoy a cigar with his buddies, business beats pleasure every time. Then again, Rome has worked hard to make his pleasure his business.

Sitting at a restaurant on the grounds of The Resort at Pelican Hill, an opulent golf resort located in Newport Beach, California, Rome reflects on a vision he had back in his teens. Unlike many who aspire to broadcast sports, Rome never sought to be a play-by-play announcer.

“I wanted to have a canvas and I wanted to interview athletes and just give my opinion,” says Rome, the urgency and sharpness of his speech reinforced by his crisp button-down shirt and the sharp, well-kept lines of his dark moustache and goatee. “And just kind of talk junk and provide some entertainment and information. And I felt like I could not do that as a play-by-play person.”



Rome loves to have a cigar at the race track or in his backyard. He has a short list of favorites: Cuban Partagás, Norteño by Drew Estate and the cigar he's smoking here, Padrón Serie 1926.

Junk? Well, the audience knows what Rome is up to, appreciates how he doesn't talk like an omniscient broadcaster. He prefers to speak more like one of the guys. "Make a run or bust it up once and for all," Rome said this spring in a segment about the Los Angeles Clippers. "And everyone knew it. So what happens? They go out and get punked in their own building the very first night."

On a more whimsical but still pointed note, here was Rome waxing poetic about toasted grasshoppers, a new food item offered at Seattle Mariners games: "This is so Mariners, too. Doing anything to distract the world from their god-awful, last-place, 2-7 baseball team... A hot dog? At a baseball game? Not in Seattle, bro. We'd rather slam a bowl full of toasted insects... but I'm sure anything is easier to swallow than a 16th straight season without the playoffs."

The website stucknut.com has a section that it has dubbed "Jim Rome Smacktionary," a glossary of hundreds of terms deployed on the show, be

it those christened by Rome or created by devout fans, dubbed "The Clones." "Crying Irish" is reserved for whining Notre Dame fans, "Montanalow" is for the physical resemblance between iconic quarterback Joe Montana and singer Barry Manilow, "Jungle Dweller" for a frequent caller, and the one that describes Rome, "the King of Smack."

HBO announcer Jim Lampley has a keen grasp on Rome's arresting flavor. "If you were looking for a handbook on how to make a show, this would be it," says Lampley, who has been a guest on Rome's show many times. "Make fun of people who would let it be OK. Use repetitive language that would establish membership in the cult. And keep expanding the cult. If you don't understand what's going on here, just keep listening, and gradually you will get the drift."

But if you had to distill the lexicon of "The Jungle" down to its essence—and the urgent, rapid patter of Rome's show begs that you darn well better do this soon—it would likely boil down to a pair of phrases that collectively take up a handful of words.

At runner-up, "don't suck." This has two valid meanings. First, make your comment compelling. The other, less obvious but perhaps more powerful: Don't fawn over the athletes. Just because they play a sport well doesn't mean they are perfect.

First prize goes to the phrase that could well earn Rome a spot in the book, *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*: "Have a take." Bring something to the table. But you better be ready to back it up with at least a little evidence. And keep in mind that you likely won't have as much data at your disposal as Rome. As Lampley notes, "I've almost never heard him ask a caller, 'Describe it to me' when referring to a specific game."

The crackling voice with the whip-smart ability to turn a phrase and not suffer fools. The locomotive charging full-speed down the track, spitting out ample opinions that might ruffle more than a few feathers. The engaged mind, fueled by an encyclopedic recollection

of sports present and past. It all adds up not just to a leisurely chat, but a verbal form of liquid nitrogen. For some of a certain age, this might sound familiar. Without a doubt, Rome's approach has roots in another broadcasting notable, the legendary Howard Cosell. Back in the '60s and '70s, starting on radio, expanding to ABC's "Wide World of Sports" and "Monday Night Football," Cosell took sports media into new territory. As he wrote in his 1973 autobiography, "I learned early on that sports is a part of life, that it is human life in microcosm, and that the virtues and flaws of the society exist in sports even as they exist everywhere else... I have been a shock treatment to many people who have grown up subject to the carefully created notion that the world of sport is, in fact, Shrangi-La [sic], the Lost Horizon."

A frequently held axiom in broadcast media is that the most legitimate analysis comes from the athletes. Cosell dared to challenge that assumption, per usual doing so in a strident way with another of his signature sayings: "I never played the game."



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Says Rome, “This, ‘you never played the game’ thing has always been very interesting to me. There are lots of people who have opinions about the president who have never been president... If only guys who played the game could talk about the game, where would this leave us in terms of content? I interview lots of athletes who have nothing to say about anything, yet they’re going to fill three hours a day? On a radio program or a TV show? So, I know what I am, I speak for the fan. I didn’t play the game at the highest level, but I’m well-prepped and I have opinions—and do what you want with those opinions.”

But though Cosell also shared Rome’s love of a good cigar, a major difference separates the two. Cosell was no man of the people. He fancied himself rather brilliant, had earned a law degree, even for a time toyed with running for Senate. Cosell would tell it to you, in another of his pet terms, like it is. Perhaps as a New Yorker, Cosell saw the world as a series of skyscrapers, life a fixed-in-stone hierarchy where he’d made his way to a penthouse only Cosell could occupy.

To listen to Rome, born and raised in Los Angeles, is to see the conversation around sports as more of a sprawl. Per the title of the popular Guns N’ Roses song that’s part of the show, “Welcome to the Jungle.” Certainly a man who has run his own show for more than 20 years will often have the last word. Hey, it’s his jungle, and Rome rules it with surefire authority.

Cosell, alas, began and ended believing he knew more than anyone. It’s different in Rome’s world. To use a word his audience would likely despise, Rome’s show is communal. “Don’t call me and ask me a question,” says Rome. “You can, but I don’t think that’s very compelling.” His sport of choice in high school being tennis, Rome enjoys a good verbal rally. “Here’s my take. What’s your take?” he says about his approach. “Let’s be aggressive and let’s be opinionated, but let’s be responsible.”

To get an idea of how sports-obsessed Rome has always been, head back to 1980 and the period prior to his 16th birthday. Rome had grown up comfortable since the age of 12 in Calabasas, a suburb west of L.A.’s San Fernando Valley, but thanks to watching his parents run their own business (making and selling medical garments), he was well aware that success required significant effort. Turning 16 in California meant Rome would earn his driver’s license, but he also knew that the gift wasn’t going to be a car.

Rome’s desired birthday present was a large painting of Terry Bradshaw he’d seen in a mall. Bradshaw’s Pittsburgh Steelers were Rome’s favorite team. One of Rome’s first sports memories had been when he was eight years old and witnessed the 1972 “Immaculate Reception,” the incredibly dramatic and controversial end to a playoff game between the Steelers and Oakland Raiders. As that 16th birthday neared, the Steelers had won four of the last six Super Bowls.

His passion for sports began at an early age. When he was seven, encouraged by his father Jay, Rome sent a fan letter to a Los Angeles Lakers star, Gail Goodrich. Weeks later came an autographed picture. Bradshaw and Goodrich were half of Rome’s childhood Mt. Rushmore, the other spots taken by Dodger third baseman Ron Cey and a tennis star, the stoic Swede, Bjorn Borg. As is the case for the vast majority of adolescents who both play and watch sports, Rome soon enough saw that there was no way he was going to become a professional athlete.

The obsession only accelerated. To read *Sports Illustrated* and *Sport Magazine*. To listen to such L.A.-based broadcasting icons as Vin Scully with the Dodgers, Chick Hearn with the Lakers, Dick Enberg with the Rams. To attend various games with Jay. “And I tried to think about that pretty long and hard,” says Rome. “If I’m not going to play the game, what can I do? Well, I could talk about the game.” And so, while many teenagers flirted with various career possibilities, Rome was dead certain what he wanted.

One of Rome’s schoolmates was a girl named Roselyn Porter. Her father, Ross, was a prominent broadcaster for NBC and the Dodgers. Rome would persistently ask Roselyn if he could talk to her dad about a variety of sports-related topics, but the two didn’t meet until a “Career Day” at Rome’s school—at which point the aspiring broadcaster asked Porter question after question, an embryonic version of the rat-a-tat style he’d later sharpen.

As Rome continues the story of his youth across the table at Pelican Grill, it’s easy to imagine Rome seeing himself from a distance: Who the heck was that kid? And who is the kid now who will one day query Rome?

“And he finally looks at me and he says, ‘Young man, what is your name anyway?’ I said, ‘Jim Rome, sir. Jim Rome.’ He said, ‘Jim Rome—I’ve heard all about you.’”

Ross Porter got an early taste of the tough, quick questioning that so many sports fans and pro athletes would later be subject to. Upon arrival at the University of California at Santa Barbara in the fall of 1982, Rome rapidly made his way to the campus radio station. There came an internship opportunity, Rome willingly waking many a morning at 4:30 to work for free. Most Saturday nights, he’d skip a college party to work a game or operate an engineering board. It was the same kind of dedication and discipline one

associates with an ambitious, driven and highly fit young athlete, a physical fitness level Rome maintains to this day, an attribute that likely helps boost Rome’s credibility with the athletes he encounters.

Then came a hurdle that briefly took Rome off his mission. Passed over at the last minute for a job at a Santa Barbara radio station, Rome felt angered at the rather random aspect of the hiring process—how events, as it were, had taken the bat out of his hands. The best way to control his destiny, Rome determined, would be to join the family business. Jay resisted, pointing out that Jim had never paid a minute of attention to it. But Jim insisted. There followed nine months of Rome proving he was not cut out for this line of work. Soon after, he began to sell other products such as dictation equipment and telephone systems. More failure.

But then, another offer: A month-long gig at KTMS in Santa Barbara, calling news and traffic 30 hours a week for \$5 an hour. Rome took the post, earned a full-time spot and in time was given an hour-long sports talk show. Seeking to make a name for himself beyond the world of local Santa Barbara sports, Rome hustled, arranging interviews with such notables as football star Jim Brown and basketball coach Dick Vitale. He’d also send interesting tidbits from his show to media outlets such as *The Sporting News* and the *Los Angeles Times*.

Rome’s big break came in December 1990, when he was hired by XTRA, also known as The Mighty 690, a San Diego-based station. Says Rome, “That was only the second station in the country to throw the

**“I speak for the fan. I didn’t play
the game at the highest level,
but I’m well prepped and
I have opinions—and do what
you want with those opinions.”**
—*Jim Rome*

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switch and go all sports.” Five days a week, five hours a night, Rome spoke about sports from 7 p.m. ’til midnight. “You know how weird that was?” he asks. “Every kind of tweaker and weirdo and sports addict imaginable.”

He was determined to be different, to be something other than what he calls the bland “Shell Answer Man” sportscaster. But rather than merely seek to be interesting, Rome saw that the ticket was to be interested, to passionately engage in sports the way he had in his youth—to talk and argue and continually chew around opinions and ideas. “I was taking that conversation and putting it out on a 50,000-watt radio station and getting a bunch of new friends to come in,” says Rome. “Except not everybody was my friend. All of a sudden not everybody liked it, but they were paying attention, and they were reacting and they were calling.”

May 29, 1993 was a major day in the history of “The Jungle.” The Los Angeles Kings had upset the Toronto Maple Leafs to reach the Stanley Cup finals for the first time. When the seventh game victory was over, the Kings’ leader, the one and only Wayne Gretzky (who appeared on the cover of *CIGAR AFICIONADO* in 1997), looked into the camera and praised his friend Jim Rome and how the team unquestionably had “Jungle Karma,” a Rome term for the good vibes that would flow an athlete’s way in the wake of guesting on the show (and the bad ones that would affect those who declined).

There also came controversy. In the early ’90s, Rome had learned that several members of the Los Angeles Rams jokingly called their quarterback, Jim Everett “Chris Everett,” a reference to female tennis star Chris Evert that cast aspersions on Everett’s toughness. Rome began to call Everett that on the air. Everett agreed to come on the show on April 6, 1994. Prior to their interview, according to Rome, his producer, Mark Shapiro, told Everett that Rome planned to call him “Chris” a few times—but not too many. “So we’re all ready to go, and I think all the cards are on the table,” says Rome. Everett voiced his disdain for the nickname and warned Rome not to call him Chris, and before long the much-larger quarterback flipped the interview table and knocked Rome down to the ground, jumping on him before producers broke up the melee. “I did not want that to happen,” says Rome. He also says that for years after, he sought to interview Everett again, but Everett never would. “And I finally stopped asking,” says Rome.

“The Jungle” had taken off. As CBS sportscaster Lesley Visser says, “He was original and had the confidence and skill to pull it all off.” By 1994, Rome had also become a TV star, hosting his show on ESPN2. (Rome had other stints on television, the latest on Showtime with “Jim Rome On Showtime,” which ran from 2012 to 2015.) In 1996 came syndication—the gravy train of life in the media.

Given that sports has consumed Rome his entire life, it makes sense that an athletic endeavor would be a prime spot for him to enjoy a cigar. In this case, though, it involves an athlete he has no possibility of interviewing. A decade ago, Rome and his wife, Janet (the two married in 1997), began to buy shares in thoroughbreds. Within two years, though, it was hardly going

well. “I’m ready to pull the plug,” says Rome. Opting to give horse racing one last shot, Jim and Janet cast their lot with a horse named Mizdirection, who in time won two Breeders’ Cup races. Other than his wedding day and the birth of his two boys, Jake and Logan, Rome considers those moments with Mizdirection the most amazing days of his life.

The race track and in his backyard with friends are the times Rome most enjoys a cigar, and Rome counts three stellar cigars among the favorites in his stable: the Padrón Serie 1926 No. 9, the Partagás Serie E No. 2 and the Norteño Robusto Grande by Drew Estate.

“It’s connected to milestones, maybe a new contract, maybe something to celebrate. And mostly socially,” says Rome about his cigar smoking. “If I can get with my guys and get to the backyard and pour a cocktail and sit and have a cigar, that’s as good a time as you could ever have.”



Rome at Lone Wolf in West Los Angeles. “If I can get with my guys and get to the backyard and pour a cocktail and sit and have a cigar,” he says, “that’s as good a time as you could ever have.”

Maybe. For as much as Rome speaks longingly of the desire for peaceful moments, his engagement with sports remains ceaseless. Avoid the bland? Mission accomplished. Be it his own takes, those from callers or the way he sparks it up in his interviews, Rome has created a sports talk community that in some way anticipated today’s world of nonstop conversation—beyond radio and TV, to a world where blogs, tweets, podcasts and posts can make anyone a 24-7 host.

But Rome was the pioneer, persistently willing to tell the world that the emperor has no clothes, happy to know that if everyone wanted to be on his show, he wouldn’t be doing his job; and, he concedes, the same would hold true if nobody wanted to be on the show. “I do not root for anything other than something to talk about,” says Rome. “I’m Team Content.”

“His legacy is there,” says John Feinstein, the prominent sportswriter who has been a frequent guest on Rome’s show. “He did things no one else has done. He’s actually touched his listeners.”

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TROUBLE in Paradise

A huge influx of visitors to Cuba has brought exorbitant price increases that are dampening enthusiasm for travelers

BY GORDON MOTT

The loosening of travel restrictions to Cuba brings good news and bad news. In the 1990s, the few Americans who were approved to make the trip were smart to bring basic amenities—even toilet paper—and to be prepared for sporadic electricity and nonexistent hot water at hotels. Now, tourism to Cuba is widely available and modernized, but is no longer the great deal it had been. Today's visitor may pay \$600 a night for very basic hotel rooms, \$350 a day for guides and chauffeurs and \$40 for restaurant entrees.

The soaring prices coupled with slow-moving improvements to services and infrastructure are a bitter pill for travelers to Cuba, which could slow down the phenomenal growth in tourism to the island, which increased by 13 percent last year alone.

One of Britain's largest travel tour companies pinpoints Cuba's problems on its webpage: "Having organized tailor-made trips to Cuba for over four years [our] standard of tailor-made experiences are not currently achievable in Cuba, which needs time to catch up with the demand it is facing."

The first evidence of a changing demand in U.S.-based travel has come from the airlines. American Airlines cut back its scheduled flights to Cuba by nearly 25 percent this spring, and JetBlue also reduced its service. Three airlines, Spirit, Frontier and Silver Airways, are planning to terminate their flights altogether. An American Airlines spokesperson said the flights had been dropped "to remain competitive" in the market, but published reports say that the demand for flights has not been as high as anticipated, especially with a 300 percent increase in available seats after the routes were approved.

Local tourism professionals in Cuba, people-to-people tour operators in the United States and others with knowledge of Havana confirm the wide range of difficulties that face travelers heading to Cuba. Across the board, they are bracing for a slowdown in U.S.-based tourism in 2017.

Tom Popper, the president of Insight Cuba, which plans on operating nearly 200 people-to-people visits in 2017 (down from 250 in 2016), says that his primary task is managing expectations. "With those higher

prices,” says Popper, “there are higher expectations, but we, with purpose, try to set those expectations. We tell people their visit isn’t about the hotel or the food, it’s about the experience. Cuba still has its magic...the experience hasn’t changed.” However, he quickly adds that the “Obama crest has crested” and he expects a new normal to take effect as the travel demand starts to “quiet down.”

The changes in Cuba’s tourism world began roiling the country in December 2014. After quiet negotiations with the government of President Raúl Castro, President Barack Obama announced a round of diplomatic initiatives that eventually led, in July 2016, to the reestablishing of diplomatic relations between the two nations. While these moves left the trade embargo with Cuba intact, and the strict guidelines for legal travel under 12 authorized categories, the U.S. government relaxed the reporting rules and the stringent interpretations of what constituted legal

travel. Late last year, the U.S. government began permitting travelers to bring Cuban cigars (and alcohol) back to the U.S. when traveling abroad, product categories that had either been prohibited or sharply curtailed for decades.

At the same time, the U.S. and Cuban governments began negotiating a new air-travel agreement, which led in September 2016 to the inauguration of the first regularly scheduled flights in 50 years. Initially service excluded the capital city of Havana for flights between the United States and nine smaller Cuban cities. Havana routes were added later. Nearly 100 flights now connect the two nations each week. Eight cruise lines were also authorized to start making port calls in Cuba, with Carnival Corp.’s Fathom line becoming the first U.S. carrier to dock in Havana in May 2016. Many experts believe the cruises could bring nearly 170,000 more tourists to the island this year.

Cuba’s Ministry of Tourism announced that the country received more than four million visitors in 2016, surpassing even its own predictions of about 3.7 million. That was a 13 percent increase over 2015, and presented more than a 25 percent increase in total since the 2014 changes in U.S.-Cuban relations. The increase in American tourists to Cuba has been even steeper: the 614,000 who visited in 2016, according to the Ministry, marked a 34 percent increase over 2015 numbers.

The booming increase in Cuba tourism highlights an underlying problem: Cuba was not ready for the huge influx of travelers. No major hotels have opened during that period. One large luxury hotel is slated to open its doors this summer: the Gran Hotel Manzana Kempinski La Habana. While Airbnb now touts Havana as its fastest growing market in the world, most of those accommodations lack such amenities as Wi-Fi or air conditioning, and prices are reported to be rising quickly and exorbitantly. Even while new restaurants open regularly, the best private restaurants, known as paladares, are often solidly booked, and food quality across the island remains problematic. The best restaurant in Havana, La Guarida, often does more than 200 covers a night, and turns tables two or three times. At least one published report suggested that the demand for food in the restaurant universe was creating food shortages for the Cuban people.



Once-affordable Havana hotels have become extremely expensive. The Meliá Habana (above) quoted a price of \$678 for a standard room this spring, \$847 on an executive-level floor.

John Kavulich, the president of the U.S.-Cuba Economic Trade Council, is blunt about the problems. “We have businessmen coming back with the perception that U.S. company representatives are being abused. They are paying \$200, \$300, \$400 a night for rooms that should be \$79.99.” Kavulich, whose organization promotes legal business activity between Cuba and the United States, says the Cuban government is promising to tackle the problem and reduce room rates, “but it’s too little too late.”

If changes or adjustments are coming, they were not evident in early March during a visit to Havana. The Meliá Habana, one of the better hotels in the city, was asking 600 CUC (Cuban convertible pesos) for one

“We have businessmen coming back from Cuba with the perception that they are being abused. They are paying \$200, \$300, \$400 a night for rooms that should be \$79.99.”

night in a standard room, which amounts to \$678 when factoring in the penalty for exchanging U.S. dollars into CUCS, the currency used by all tourists in Cuba. An executive level room, which amounts to nothing more than an upgraded single room, was 750 CUCS, or \$847, a rack rate that would raise eyebrows in London or New York City.

One Mexican visitor, who traveled on short notice, and stayed at the Habana Libre, a rundown hotel in Havana’s Vedado section, was charged 400 CUC, or \$452, per night. The new Kempinski, part of a luxury European hotel chain, is expected to debut with room rates between \$600 to \$700 a night. Touted as Havana’s first true five-star hotel, it will need to provide the kind of quality expected from those prices.

Restaurant prices also are quite variable. In past years, restaurant entrees other than lobster rarely topped 20 CUC. Now, 20 CUC is common, and individual item prices can exceed 30 CUC and reach as much as 40 CUC. At one top government restaurant, El Templete, which faces the main dock



One of Cuba's many cigar shops, with a box of handmade Cohibas sitting on the counter. Cigar prices are one of the few things that have remained constant in Cuba during its tourism boom.

in Havana's harbor, an octopus entree on a recent visit was priced at 30 CUC, and lunch for two with two beers came to more than 100 CUC.

In today's Havana, it is not uncommon to spend between 50 CUC and 60 CUC per person at any restaurant with pretensions for fine cuisine. Those prices quickly run much higher if wine is ordered. One tour operator, who asked to remain anonymous, recounted going to a well-known paladar with a group and receiving a bill that came out to 190 CUC per person. "I thought something was wrong," he says, "but when I checked the menu, the dishes were all 40 CUC or higher."

Another tour operator reports that private drivers had previously been charging 150 to 200 CUC as recently as 2016 for a round-trip drive to Trinidad, a city in south-central Cuba that is roughly a four-hour drive from Havana. This year, the price had gone up to 350 CUC. "I got a call recently from one of my usual drivers, who had taken my clients to Trinidad," says the operator. "He threatened to leave without them unless I agreed to pay him \$450. What could I do?"

Cuba Prices—Then and Now

ITEM/SERVICE	2016	2017
Cup of Espresso, Hotel	2 cuc	3 cuc
Glass of 7-Year-Old Rum, Hotel	5 cuc	7 cuc
Partagás Serie D No. 4 (1 cigar)	7 cuc	7 cuc
Cab Ride in Havana	10-15 cuc	20 cuc
Restaurant Entrée	15-20 cuc	25-40 cuc
Cohiba Robusto (box of 25)	340 cuc	340 cuc
Car Ride to Trinidad (round trip)	150-200 cuc	350 cuc
Premier Hotel Room	350-400 cuc	600 cuc +

Source: Cigar Aficionado

The operator, who deals mostly with private travelers and helps set up people-to-people compliant itineraries, says that clients are comparing Cuba prices to other countries, and the comparison is lacking. "I'm getting a lot of pushback on pricing right now," he says. "People are asking things like 'I can go to Mexico for the weekend for \$500. Why is Cuba more than \$2,000?'" The operator adds that while the company is still able to offer its clients a wonderful experience, people who are trying to go on their own "are having a terrible time." In part, that is because the big tour operators are able to negotiate somewhat lower prices for bigger groups. Still some of them have said they have gone back to clients between the booking date and departure to ask for more money to cover unexpected price increases.

Happily, prices on Cuba's most famous product, a fine cigar, have remained quite inexpensive, despite the soaring prices in other sectors. Many of Cuba's great cigars still sell for around 10 CUC or less per cigar.

You'll pay more for Cohibas and large cigars such as double coronas and Churchills, but there's plenty to buy for a great price. A Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure No. 2 sells for 7 CUC per cigar, a Bolivar Belicoso Fino is a mere 7.65 CUC and a Montecristo No. 2 sells for 9.65 CUC. Even more surprising is these prices have been unchanged since 2015.

One Cuban official, speaking off the record, acknowledges that the government knows it has a problem with soaring hotel, restaurant and transportation charges, and had commissioned a study to examine how to control the surge. He recognizes that given the government's history of starting and then rolling back economic reforms, many Cubans were skeptical of rule changes that allowed so much private economic activity. That skepticism also had an effect on people trying to get what they could while they can, he says. But he adds, "We know we can't go back to the way things were. We are not going back. I can promise you that."

Popper says, "Of course, it was inevitable that prices had to go up. But the Cubans have been slow to react. The market is definitely cooling down. And they may find themselves with a lot of empty hotel rooms this summer and fall." He adds that Cuban officials were told about the pushback in 2016, but had not responded.

Micheal Zucato, who is the general director of Cuba Travel Services, another people-to-people tour operator, believes that prices are going to moderate over the next six months. "It is going to take awhile to take effect, and for demand to fully recover. But we still see a lot of demand for people wanting to visit Cuba." He notes that for many such travellers, the price isn't their biggest concern, and they still are getting a wonderful experience.

Another tour operator, who asked to remain anonymous, isn't so sure prices will come down any time soon. "If hotel prices go up and hotels are still full, how can we convince anyone to lower the prices? And private house owners smell money, and due to the influx of Americans, there is still a big pond to fish in...As long as they keep coming and rave about their experiences when they get back home, nobody is going to stop the price hikes. On the contrary. That won't happen until it gets too expensive and other destinations offer a similarly unique experience for less money. But that's in the future." ❖

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The **NEW** **COURSES** *of* **2017**

After a long lull, golf course design is showing a creative upturn with many new wrinkles

BY JEFF WILLIAMS

RYAN FARROW

The distinctive splendor of Sand Valley Resort, built on a massive sand basin in central Wisconsin.

Bring your wedge when you visit Nekoosa, Wisconsin's Sand Valley, which has no shortage of bunkers. The Lake Leopold cottages (below) contain spacious great rooms.



SAND VALLEY

For new golf courses, 2017 is a very special year.

While course development in the United States was shanked out of bounds by the economic downturn of 2008 and new construction is still rare, gems are emerging that are defining a new era of golf architecture.

This year courses are opening across the land, from Pennsylvania to Oregon, from Florida to Wisconsin, from New Orleans to Alameda, California. Many are privately owned resorts, some are publicly owned municipal courses. Some are built on sand located far from the ocean. A couple are designed to be played forward and back. Some are forgiving layouts. One even has a place to smoke surrounded by green. What they have in common are creative, driven developers with a passion for the game and communities that see golf as a centerpiece of their redevelopment.

At the forefront of this renaissance is Mike Keiser, the Pied Piper of remote golf course development, the man who goes out of his way to go out of his way. The first of his two-course Sand Valley Resort complex in central Wisconsin opened this year. The raves were reminiscent of his seminal Bandon Dunes project, where 20 years ago in Oregon he proved if you find exceptional ground, seek out the right architect and make golf, and only golf, the centerpiece of your passion, the players will come.

"Golf courses are again being built for golf reasons," says Josh Lesnik of KemperSports in Chicago, the managing firm for Keiser's Bandon Dunes. "In the '80s, '90s, some of the 2000s, people wanted golf not necessarily for a great course but to sell homes or be close to a good demographic area. They weren't as concerned with building a great golf course as they were with some other business idea."

Keiser has shown the way, and it's been a long, long way, with remote



courses like Sand Valley, which is three hours from the closest major airport, Milwaukee. Jon Scott, whose family-owned Gull View Lake Resort in western Michigan is adding a sixth course this year, sees Keiser as the model for special golf. "Mike is an obvious example if you do it right, even in a declining market, you can be wildly successful."

Golf has also become a tool for economic stimulus. The family-owned Retreat at Silvies Valley Ranch in far-eastern Oregon was developed as way to spark the tourism industry in a part of the state which has virtually no tourism.

"The only reason to build anything anymore is if you are doing something that is really special, and have people that want to do that," says Tom Doak, who designed Keiser's second course at Bandon Dunes and a second course at Barnbougle Dunes. "There's no question Mike has

had a huge impact. First of all, he built quite a few places and keeps doing it, and second of all, that's what gives somebody in the middle of nowhere the idea that he can be successful doing the same thing."

Countering the era of the 1990s and early 2000s when courses seemed to be designed to challenge the likes of Tiger Woods, Keiser has also ushered in an age of courses built for everyone: easy enough from the forward tees for the high handicapper, challenging enough from the back for the accomplished golfer. "The architects, the developers, the media, we all bought into the lie that the harder the golf course was, the better it was," says Doak. "The upshot of that was that everyone, including me, built a bunch of really difficult courses. The public voted with their pocketbook—they would play these courses once or twice and not come back. Mike wants courses for the regular guy, and they are voting with their pocketbook by coming back."

We won't detail all the projects here, but those we feel have a special story.

Sand Valley Resort

Nekoosa, Wisconsin

When Mike Keiser found out there was a massive sand basin in central Wisconsin, he sent Josh Lesnik to see it.

"I told him to tell me why I don't want to go look at it," says Keiser. "He said you've got to see it to believe it. And it was unbelievable." He found an incredible landscape hidden under more than a thousand acres

of commercially planted pine forest, masking its potential for great golf. On close examination, and fairly physical trekking ("burrowing" as Keiser describes it), this massive remnant of the American Ice Age was just the place for some very special golf.

So he brought in his regulars, Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw and Kidd to create the two courses. The Coore & Crenshaw course, known as Sand Valley, opens this year. Kidd's course, Mammoth Dunes, will have preview play later in the year and full play next year. This is heathland golf at its best.

"We've had fun with Mike at Sand Valley because for years he said he would only go to a site with sand and an ocean," says Coore. "Well, Sand Valley has a tremendous amount of sand but it's quite removed from the ocean." While the site has the earmarks—sand, fescue and rugged looking bunkers—of courses that Keiser and he have created, the designer adds that "this is very different in terms of the land forms. It's not what I would call dunes, it's ridges and valleys."

As for Kidd's course, Keiser had a plan. "Mike took me to Pine Valley twice in a year, so I'm guessing he wants it to be heavily influenced by it," says Kidd. "I love Pine Valley. It's absolutely unique, there's nothing like it in the world I can think of. I'm not trying to copy it in any way, but I'm certainly influenced by it. The scrubby vegetation combined with the sand and forested edges make for a really natural look."

Sand Valley will have a small lodge to begin with, and though it is remote in golf terms it's not far from the Wisconsin Dells vacation mecca, with its many accommodations. It's also an hour and change from Herb Kohler's courses at Blackwolf Run and Whistling Straits.

Sand Valley is a remnant of the last Ice Age, that was later hidden under acres of commercially grown pine.





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STREAMSONG



Florida's Streamsong, seen at the clubhouse (top), is opening a third (Black) course designed by Gil Hanse. The Blue course (lower left) is the work of Tom Doak, and the Red (lower right) is a Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw design. The latter two courses are comingled, wrapping around each other.

Streamsong

Bowling Green, Florida

Five years ago, when Streamsong opened just over an hour east of the Tampa International Airport, its Coore & Crenshaw and Doak courses (Red and Blue) were instantly acclaimed as among the best public courses in the U.S. Pretty good for a mining company project.

And now Mosaic, that Minnesota phosphate mining corporation that owns around 300,000 acres in Florida, is opening up a third course by Gil Hanse (the Black).

"It's the first opportunity we've had to put our work alongside the...guys we respect the most in the business: Tom Doak and Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw," says Hanse. "Whenever an owner like Mosaic is willing to give you your pick of around 800 acres and it's all sand, that's incredible. What is great about Red and Blue is that they routed them at the same time and they are comingled and wrap around each other and cross over each other. With the Black Course we are off on our own in a big landscape. Our land is not as dramatic as Red and Blue, but we have interesting land forms that the

course runs through. Visually there is a lot of similarities between the courses, lots of sand, rough bunkers, but scale-wise is the big difference for Black."

For the Mosaic CFO Rich Mack, who oversaw land management when the project began, demand drove the need for a third course.

"We are in the business in Florida of mining, we own a lot of land," says Mack. "Rather than do the same thing we had been doing essentially for almost a century, we decided to do something different, something more progressive, something that would have more of a long-lasting impact in the context of it employed people. That's a very powerful story for a company that is in the mining business."

As for the Black Course, "It's a very powerful golf course," says Mack. "We have a very compelling feature, a two-acre putting green we are calling The Gauntlet. Inside the green we have a peninsula that will have a spacious fire pit, Adirondack chairs, a perfect area to sit back and enjoy a good cigar. We will have a world-class practice facility, something we are calling the Roundabout—a short course with six green complexes on a free-flowing basis."

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Stoatin Brae, the work of Doak's Renaissance Golf, adds a sixth course to Gull Lake View in Augusta, Michigan.

STOATIN BRAE

Stoatin Brae, Gull Lake View Resort Augusta, Michigan

Gull Lake View is the biggest, least-known golf resort in the United States. But hey, it's in Augusta...Michigan.

And this year it adds a sixth course, Stoatin Brae, designed by Tom Doak's crew at Renaissance Golf. This is a family-owned-and-operated business, which has designed and built four of the courses and sells more than 120,000 tee times a year, with consistent repeat business from Detroit, Chicago and Indianapolis areas.

"I'm a little embarrassed about it and not a little surprised," says Jon Scott, when asked about Gull View's lack of national visibility. "It's a family business, fourth generation, my grandfather started the business in 1962. We've grown it from nine holes to 108. We've always been this small family business that over time we've grown big enough to now, we're a fairly big resort. We're dirt guys. We designed and built four out of the six courses ourselves. We've always been word-of-mouth, under the radar."

Stoatin Brae will likely expand Gull View's blip on the golf radar. It's quite different from the other Gull View parkland offerings, a big piece of land high on a hill with expansive views.

"This course is so different from the others," says Scott. "There are like five trees, pretty windy up on top of the hill there. Huge long views. It's different from what we have which is why we built it. We got Doak's group to help us out. We did a lot of the work ourselves. There were a lot of things making this economically viable in a market that is otherwise losing share."

Doak, who was busy on other projects, had his associates do the job and reports, "I think it turned out really good. It's an understated thing, but it's a pretty piece of ground with good views off the top, there are some really good golf holes on it."

On weekends, it will be about 100 bucks to play it. Now that is something new and refreshing and decidedly under the radar.

The Loop at Forest Dunes Roscommon, Michigan

Tom Doak had this idea for a long time, itching to do it—a reversible golf course, 18 greens with tees that allow it to be played in both directions.

"There is a little bit about it in the appendix to Tom Simpson's book on golf course design written in the '20s," Doak says. "He used to build estate courses for wealthy people, three holes or six holes and to make them more interesting occasionally he would build one that you could play forwards and backwards. I looked at the drawing a long time ago and said what a cool idea, I'd love to do that if I found the right client."

Then Lew Thompson, the owner of the Forest Dunes Resort, called him about doing a second course at his facility. He wasn't thinking about a reversible golf course, but after Doak saw the property "it seemed perfect for the concept," says Doak. "It wasn't a dramatic piece of ground visually, relatively flat and sandy which would be conducive to making this concept work. Didn't have a lot of specimen trees on it, because if you have they are probably going to get in the way going one direction or the other."

This is the first full season for The Loop, its courses are named the Red and the Black and are played in one direction one day, the opposite direction the next. So, in a way, Forest Dunes now has three courses.

"A hilly property, you are going to have trouble," says Doak. "A big elevated tee, you can't play back up that slope to the previous green. If you play up to the top of a hill or over the hill and back down, it might work one direction, but probably a blind hole going the other way."

So instead, Doak took an average piece of ground and transformed it into an above-average experience.



The reversible Retreat at Silvie Valley Ranch was developed to draw tourism to eastern Oregon.

THE RETREAT AT SILVIE VALLEY RANCH

The Retreat at Silvie Valley Ranch Burns, Oregon

Way out in eastern Oregon, as remote as it gets in the American West, is Silvie Valley Ranch. When veterinarian/entrepreneur Scott Campbell bought its 140,000 acres in 2007 the idea was to find a way to stimulate a regional economy that had hit bottom after the lumber industry abandoned the area.

“My wife and I grew up here. We were looking for something that could create jobs, the services you need,” says Campbell. “The only thing that showed potential was tourism, since it’s beautiful. We have done a lot of habitat restoration on the ranch.”

But another possibility suggested itself. “Brought a bunch of my friends that were serious golf fanatics and showed them this property without saying what we were thinking about. Everyone of them said ‘God, this would be a great place to have a golf course.’”

Not just a conventional one either. Architect Dan Hixson designed his own version of a reversible course, this one with 27 greens. He also created a par-3 course and is finishing up what he describes as a challenge course on some extreme terrain.

“We are all aware that Silvie Valley isn’t truly a links course between the sea and farmland, but I do enjoy that style,” says Hixson. “I technically would be called a minimalist, have worked on land that didn’t require a lot of earth moving, so it’s in the spirit of the links course, it’s built that way. It really just lies on the land. If Mother Nature made a bump there and a ditch here, it’s pretty much used whenever possible.”

And golf is made possible again in the most remote of areas, five hours from Portland, maybe three and a half from Boise, Idaho. Silvie Valley Ranch awaits the adventurous.

Mossy Oak West Point, Mississippi

George Bryan, the founder of the private Old Waverly Golf Club (host of the 1999 U.S. Women’s Open), had wanted to add a public course in the area, but the economic downturn held him back. For a while.

When things improved, he partnered with the Haas family—owners of the Mossy Oak outdoor clothing brand—to acquire a piece of land virtually across the street from Old Waverly that looked just right for golf, and it had its share of old mossy oaks.

He called in Gil Hanse, who saw the property’s potential. “George wanted to build something a little more rustic, a little more natural looking and feeling (than highly manicured Waverly),” says Hanse. “When you think of Mississippi, you think of dead flat, but this piece of ground has nice roll, contours, feels a little like Shinnecock.”

It was a feel-good project for Hanse. “Part of what made Mossy Oak so terrific from our standpoint is that I’ve never been in a community or even a state where the people have such a passion for their state, to do something good for the local community.”

Shepherd’s Rock, Nemacolin Woodlands Resort Farmington, Pennsylvania

Nemacolin already had two courses. Its Mystic Rock, by the iconic and occasionally outrageous Pete Dye, had hosted a PGA Tour event. But the uninteresting second course wasn’t driving golf revenue.

So why not call in Pete Dye again?

“The key point is, one Pete Dye golf course is great for a resort, but when you get two Dye golf courses, it becomes a destination,” says Tim Liddy, Dye’s on-site project architect for Shepherd’s Rock. Liddy was given both the second course property and additional land, putting him on top of a mountain.

“For an inland golf course, it doesn’t get any better,” says Liddy. “Long views to other mountain ranges. Beautiful fall colors. You play through three or four environments. You start off playing through a wetland corridor along a stream, then you go out into pasture ground, you come back into the rocky mountain side and then the back side there is more pasture ground, great views of mountains, a spectacular view from the 18th green. A lot of texture to the course, the smooth fairways against fescue rough and the tree lines. The big rocks along the mountain and the mountain ranges in the background.”

The Mystic Rock course is still the tough championship track. Shepherd’s Rock is the friendlier version of classic mountain golf. “It will give players another course to talk about,” says Jones.

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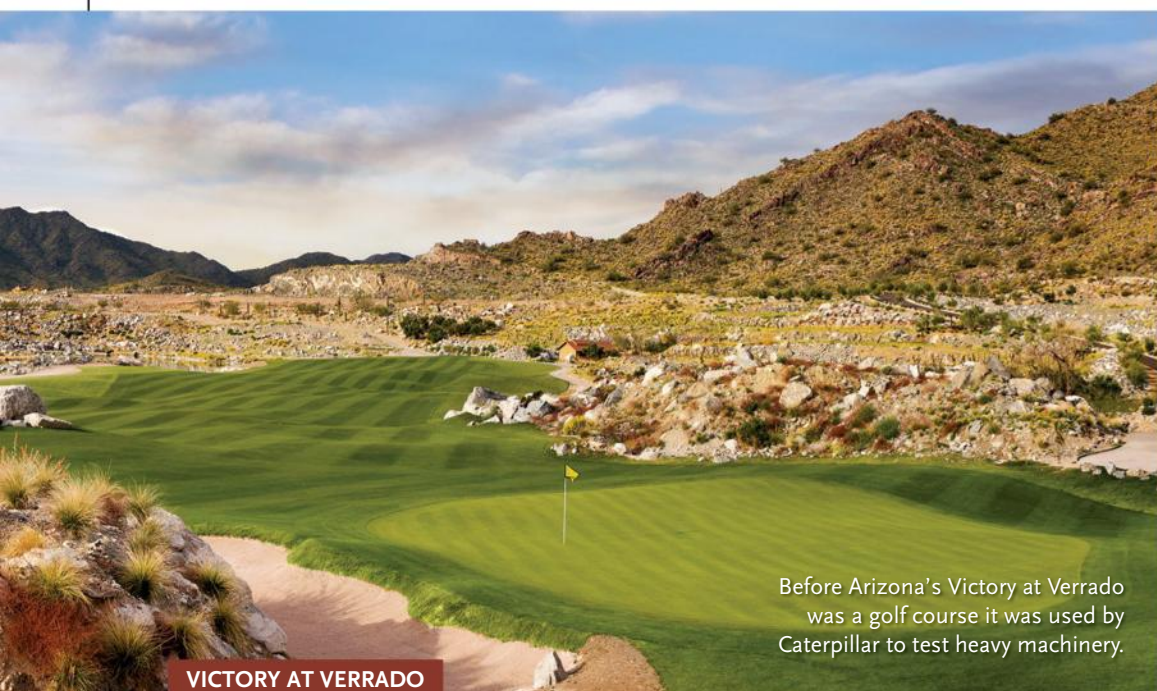
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Victory at Verrado

Buckeye, Arizona

The occasional golf course built in conjunction with real estate development still occurs, and Champions Tour player Tom Lehman, an occasional but accomplished architect, has added a second course to this planned community just to the west of Phoenix. It's not a remote destination, but has an expansive landscape that impressed even Lehman. The course is called Victory and for Lehman, it's a winner.

"It's right at the base of the White Tank Mountains in an area that was used for years and years by Caterpillar as their proving grounds," says Lehman. "They created a whole bunch of interesting shapes proving their equipment."



Before Arizona's Victory at Verrado was a golf course it was used by Caterpillar to test heavy machinery.

It gave Lehman and his team dramatic backdrops and framing, but he didn't let many of the rugged features get in the way of fun golf. It's wide open, and from most of the tees there aren't the forced carries associated with desert-style golf.

"There is lots of drama with rocks, with boulders and outcroppings," says Lehman. "Most of those areas are places where you don't hit it, so they mostly don't interfere with play." He describes it as fun a golf course to look at and a very fun course to play—and one that you can find your golf ball on.

Now that's a novel idea.

Bayou Oaks

New Orleans, Louisiana

Bayou Oaks, on the site of two courses destroyed by Hurricane Katrina flooding in 2005, has just opened, the handiwork of architect Rees Jones. The course, played through some of the great old oaks left standing, in the urban New Orleans City Park, is abiding, but its story is compelling.

After the storm's devastation, the Bayou District Foundation was formed to redevelop the ruined St. Bernard housing development area near City Park. The success of the East Lake (Atlanta) model with golf as a catalyst for the overall renewal of an impoverished area was brought to the

foundation's attention. "The point was made that golf could be a redevelopment tool in New Orleans post Katrina," says J.T. Hannan, director of governmental and public affairs for the foundation. "You won't just redevelop a few blocks of housing, you will have an enormous impact on a wide swath of the city." He adds that St. Bernard, which had been in complete disrepair, "has been transformed into a mixed-income project as they did at East Lake. Layer in retail and cradle-to-college pipeline within the neighborhood. The East Lake model of using golf as a fundraising mechanism is something that is going to be ubiquitous moving forward. It produces revenue they can leverage into larger grants."

"It's for the people of the city of New Orleans," says Jones. "It's got plenty of room because it took the envelope of two golf courses. Not overly long, it maxes out at 7,300 yards, 46 bunkers. It incorporates lagoons that were there from the previous golf courses. The major attribute are these beautiful oaks."

But the real major attribute is that golf at Bayou Oaks is helping a community recover and grow.

Jack Clark South Course

Alameda, California

Jones is also involved in another innovative municipal project in Alameda, California, at the Chuck Corica Golf Complex—right off the runways of Oakland's international airport. One of its two courses, the Jack Clark South Course, has undergone a total transformation, along with a brand new par-3 course and a completely redone practice range. This has all been done by Greenway Golf, which was granted a lease to the complex that required renovation of one of California's busiest facilities.

"At one point this was the second busiest golf course in California behind Torrey Pines," says Mark Logan, head of Greenway Golf. "We knew the property had potential, the infrastructure was dilapidated and we had come up with a plan."

And what a plan. The entire golf course, which is at sea level, was raised several feet using sand and fill from the Trans Bay Tunnel. The artificial turf from the old driving range was used to line the new sand bunkers. The new parking lot is recycled asphalt and concrete. In water-challenged California a stormwater capturing system was installed to significantly reduce water purchase during the dry season and a hybrid Bermuda grass was used on the fairways that consumes 40 percent less water.

While Logan, an Australian, has been in the golf development and management business in the states for nearly 20 years, the new South Course still has a bit of an Australian feel, taken from the Sand Belt courses near Melbourne.

And guess what. Mike Keiser, the Pied Piper, showed up at the crack of dawn to take a look at what was going on. "He sent me an e-mail saying it was a very impressive project," says Logan "He was impressed with the design, the way it looked like an Australian course, the way we went about using recycled materials."

Coming from Mike Keiser, that's an exclamation point. Enough said. ❖

Jeff Williams is a contributing editor of CIGAR AFICIONADO.

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Gin's the Thing

The classic mixing spirit is roaring back with newfound flavors and a revived role at the bar

IF YOU SEEK one spirit to give you endless enjoyment and room for exploration, look no further than the bracing, zesty, alluring charms of gin. It lies at the core of all true Martinis (sorry vodka) and is the source of a plethora of classic and newfangled cocktails. With dozens of flavoring botanicals to choose from—sometimes you'll find that many in a single bottle—it's no surprise that this juniper-driven drink has hundreds of separate brand expressions across the globe. You might be tempted to lump gin with flavored vodka, but it has a far longer history dating back hundreds of years and its complicated distillation process gives gin incredible complexity in each sip. This mercurial quaff will refresh you all summer and hold you in warming stead all winter.

Its heritage began in Holland as a quite different drink—old gin was a malty spirit named jenever (juniper in English) for its defining flavor. The

BY JACK BETTRIDGE
PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF HARRIS



British co-opted it, making the drink lighter, brighter and drier, and exporting it to the world as London dry gin. Nineteenth-century American bartenders used it to create scores of classic cocktails, flips, smashes, cobbles, fizzes, sours and, of course the regal Martini. But don't think of gin as your grandfather's drink. The recent revival of the classic cocktail culture has brought gin storming back with self-styled bar chefs rediscovering the originals and inventing new concoctions of their own. The so-called craft whiskey movement also did its part to jumpstart the category. Micro-distillers found they could quickly market a gin (a drink that takes relatively little time to finish), while they bided the years it would take for their whiskey to mature. That brought creativity and novel flavors, even while the popularity of the timeless, tangy London dry version has burgeoned. Here are some of our favorites from both worlds.

Beefeater Undoubtedly you know Beefeater from the yeoman warder pictured on its label. Born in London in 1863 and still operating there, it's earned the pictured heritage. This quintessential, full-bodied juniper-driven London dry gin makes no secret of its recipe. The other eight botanicals are almonds, angelica root, angelica seed, coriander seed, lemon peel, licorice, orris root and Seville oranges. They come together beautifully for a traditional Martini. Beefeater 24 adds Japanese sencha, Chinese green tea and grapefruit peels for zestiness. The distiller is on the second edition of its small-batch Burrough's Reserve (named for the founder). A short resting in red and white Bordeaux casks gives it creamy wood and fruit notes as well as a bronze hue. (London Dry, 94 proof, \$20; Beefeater 24, 90 proof, \$25; Burrough's Reserve 86 proof, \$75, prices vary)

Bluecoat American Dry Philadelphia is its home, and the name is a not-so-subtle thumbing-of-the-nose at British gin invaders. Bluecoat fights back with a simple recipe distinctive by its use of organic juniper and American citrus. This type of juniper berry gives it a fruitier

taste and the citrus is prominent and slightly sweet. At the same time, the gin is toasty and almost earthy. The Philadelphia Distilling Co., launched in 2005, also makes 1681 Vodka from local organic rye, although the spirit for its gin is fermented from rye, corn, barley and wheat. (94 proof, \$30)

Bombay Sapphire The name may be a bit misleading—this gin comes from England, not imperial India—but the spirit is still quite forthright about its contents, listing its botanicals right on the bottle. For Sapphire they number 10. During final distillation, the flavors are infused in a mesh basket at the top of a special still. The Sapphire East edition adds two more ingredients—lemongrass and Vietnamese black peppercorns—to the bin with the effect of amping up zest and spice. Both gins are slightly dialed back from the London dry standard, allowing the aromatics to show through. (Sapphire, 94 proof, \$22; Sapphire East, 84 proof, \$22)

Caorunn The land best known for whisky (Scotland) is becoming a source of many quirky gins, and Caorunn (pronounced ka-roon) is especially emblematic of the trend with the use of locally foraged botanicals along with traditional London dry flavors. Along with some of the more traditional botanicals, it also employs herbal dandelion, bitter rowan berries, slightly sweet Coul Blush apples and floral heather. The result is at once lush, hearty, perfumed and fruity. (83.6 proof, \$35)

Citadelle Another gin that goes against the local grain (so to speak) is Citadelle, which is made with soft wheat, not grapes, in Cognac by the brandy maker Pierre Ferrand. The distillation is done in traditional Charentaise pot stills in the off-season, when Cognac can't be made. A total of 19 botanicals are used, adding outliers like violet root, cinnamon, nutmeg, savory and grains of paradise. The profile is spicy, floral and complex. Citadelle also makes a higher marque, Reserve, which adds exotic ingredients such as Korean yuzu, génépi flower and Bleut flower and takes the unusual, but historically sound, step of a short aging in French oak casks, which rounds out the flavors. (Citadelle, 88 proof, \$25; Reserve, 88 proof, \$35)

Death's Door The name sounds ominous, but the gin is not. The moniker comes from a treacherous strait on Lake Michigan, between Door County, Wisconsin, and Washington Island, where its wild juniper berries and organic wheat are gathered. Its recipe stands out for its simplicity: just juniper, coriander and fennel seeds. While avoiding a muddled profile, the triad still discovers a wealth of flavors that includes pine, hearty licorice from the fennel and plenty of citrus and spice. (94.6 proof, \$30)

Hendrick's Another Scottish entrant, Hendrick's fairly turned the gin world around almost two decades ago when it introduced itself as a self-described "most unusual gin." Innovation started with some oddball botanicals (including yarrow wildflowers, elderflower and chamomile), then proceeded to distillation which occurs in two different types of stills: First, a kind of pot still that emphasizes juniper flavors, then a Caden-Head still, with a copper botanical basket at its top to express the subtler floral notes. The two spirits are later blended. At this point, comes the most defining difference in the gin: the infusion of Bulgarian roses and cucumber, the latter being particularly recognizable in the mix. (88 proof, \$35)

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The Martini and Gin & Tonic

Dozens of cocktails were developed with a gin base long before most Americans ever tasted vodka. Before James Bond, few would even have considered calling something a Martini without it being made from gin. The drink was quite a different quaff when it was born, developed from a mix of gin and red vermouth (or wine) at a 50/50 ratio. Later dry vermouth was introduced and its use—and not the lack thereof—defined a dry Martini. Proportions are the subject of endless arguments and vary from two parts gin/one vermouth to virtually no vermouth at all. Stirring the combination with ice in a pitcher dilutes it less. Shaking gets it colder.

Consider using orange bitters. The classic garnish is an olive. Use an onion and it becomes a Gibson.

Originally a palliative for malaria, the Gin & Tonic seems to describe itself: one part gin and one to two parts tonic water mixed over ice in a highball glass with a wedge of lime. But a recent revival (especially in Spain) has suggested many options. As well as the vast gin choices, there is a spectrum of artisanal tonics, and you can even make that component yourself (see *Good Life Guide*, page 32). Then there is the garnish, which you might want to customize to the gin. Even the glass is a subject of debate, with many choosing snifter-type vessels to enhance aroma. Not so simple now, is it? —JB



Malfy G.Q.D.I. Maybe it shouldn't come as a surprise since Italy (after Spain) is one of the foremost champions of the Gin & Tonic, but this brand makes the unusual claim that gin originated in Italy, rather than Holland. Malfy is relatively new, but undeniably Italian, with its huge component of lemons from the Amalfi Coast that make for a fresh summery flavor. Its soft juniper taste comes from Italian berries as well. The initials stand for Gin di Qualità Distillato in Italia. (82 proof, \$30)

Martin Miller's The British entrepreneur/rock promoter/publisher Martin Miller freely admits that he knew nothing about making spirits when he started in the business. But he did detect a need for a gin that you could drink neat and so he hired experts to create it for him. What they came up with was a drink with the standard botanicals, but with a twist in the production. After the gin is distilled at high strength, it is shipped to Iceland where local waters bring it down to bottling proof. That is what gives it its distinctive soft mouthfeel. As well as drinkability, the gin also displays prominent orange and lemon notes and a spicy sweetness. (90 proof, \$30)

Nolet's Even while the Dutch precursor of gin—jenever—is known as a malty spirit, this product of Holland weighs in as a luxury dry gin. Nevertheless, the Nolet family, the 10th-generation distiller of Ketel One Vodka, couldn't resist a unique direction. Nolet's distinguishes itself from the typical London effort by backing off on the juniper quotient and ramping up floral and fruity flavors. Among its botanicals are Turkish rose, peach and raspberry. Already along the pricey side with the initial Nolet's Silver, it kicked the jams out with its follow-up, the hyper-premium, limited edition Nolet's Reserve. With the addition of saffron and verbena, it is exquisite. (Silver, 95.2 proof, \$45; Reserve, 104.6 proof, \$700)

Plymouth The oldest gin made in England (it was created in 1793) Plymouth occupies a gin subcategory all its own, also called Plymouth

gin. The name arises from the Devonshire city that such gin must be made in. Similar to a London dry gin, but less juniper forward, it prefers to show off its orange and lemon notes. Still, it parades many of the other botanicals (coriander seeds, angelica root, orris root and cardamom) of the gins named for the capital city. Plymouth is more hearty than crisp, with a slight nutty character. The Naval Strength version, developed to be drunk by mariners, is higher proof, but also hotter, obscuring some of its charms. (Plymouth Original, 82.4 proof, \$33; Naval Strength, 114 proof, \$50)

Ransom Old Tom This Oregonian gin is made in the old-fashioned, but now rare style called Old Tom. Sweeter than London dry, it was most popular in the 19th century and all but disappeared after Prohibition. Ransom, a distiller of grape and grain spirits, follows tradition by subtly aging the gin, which is made from corn and malted barley. When possible the botanicals are local and organic. It is fitting that cocktail historian David Wondrich had a hand in the formulation of Ransom Old Tom, as many of the classic gin drinks of which he has written were invented using this style of gin. Fuller bodied than most gins, it has malty, almost leathery notes and smacks of orange, spice and pine. (88 proof, \$45)

Tanqueray Although it is now made in Scotland, Tanqueray (founded in the 1830s and pronounced tanker-ray) remains solidly in the crisp London dry gin category with such botanicals as the required juniper as well as coriander, angelica root and licorice. The standard release lacks a citrus component, but you'll add that anyway when you squeeze lime in for a Gin & Tonic. The superpremium Tanqueray No. Ten, made for use in a Martini, boasts citrus with a particular grapefruit note. The distiller also makes the lower-proof, Rangpur, using an east Asian variety of lime. The brand is particularly popular in the U.S., where it is said to have been Frank Sinatra's favorite. (Tanqueray, 94.6 proof, \$25; No. Ten, 94.6 proof, \$34; Rangpur, 82.6 proof, \$26) ♦

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THE *Blackjack* BALL

The most notorious casino gamblers congregate once a year for a secret party that's invite only

BY MICHAEL KAPLAN

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
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IT SEEMS LIKE a typical Saturday night in Las Vegas. Slot machines clang from one end of the Strip to the other. Various iterations of Cirque du Soleil shows go off precisely as anticipated. Poker games rev up and craps tables teem with action. And while casino blackjack pits don't show any noticeable dips in activity, surveillance and security personnel can probably take it a little easy tonight. On this particular evening, all the world's most lethal blackjack players have taken the night off. They're not at the blackjack tables counting cards or tracking shuffles or exploiting the other weaknesses of the house. Tonight, they are attending the 21st annual Blackjack Ball.

A mile or so from the city's neon-laced gambling dens, multimillion-dollar winners congregate inside an earth-toned clubhouse on the grounds of a gated housing development. Notorious advantage players and infamous card sharks sip fine Champagne, nibble on canapés and socialize in an open, relaxed manner. This is a rare Vegas opportunity for people whose very livelihoods rely on maintaining low profiles and pretending to be unskilled at games that they have devoted thousands of hours to fleecing.

The Blackjack Ball ranks as the gambling world's equivalent of the G2 Summit or World Economic Forum. Elite players fly in from around the world to socialize, rub elbows with one another, discuss future playing arrangements and make good on past ones.

Put yourself in the company of those who have innovated techniques for beating all manner of casino games, and you recognize your place in a fascinating world. "Attending the Blackjack Ball confirmed to me that I don't have to live a mundane existence," says veteran card counter Joanna Henderson. "People there support a vision so different from that of my mainstream friends. It feels like a secret society where members who have a focus on one thing can get together and share their views and experiences."

Certainly, it is one of the few gatherings where someone like Darryl Purpose will whip out an iPhone to show off a stunning minute of casino surveillance footage that focuses on him. Tall, buzz-headed and favoring thickly rimmed eyeglasses, Purpose was once called the best card counter in the game by the late blackjack god Ken Uston.

A few feet away, retired card cheat Dustin Marx shows off his moves, putting on a display of subterfuge and slight of hand that once allowed him to relieve casinos of untold sums.

Later on in the evening, some of the sharpest gamblers alive will use relevant skills to square off in a competition, showing the room just what they are capable of doing against casinos. Winner will be deemed Player of the Year. "How would you like to be the director of surveillance from MGM International and come to my party?" Max Rubin, the host of this event, asks dryly. "That will never happen and I'm not worried about them showing up. We don't sweat any of that. We have guards at the door. And they are serious security, not just on hand for show. My guys make sure that no one comes who is not on the approved list. Hell, we stock more than \$10,000 worth of Champagne here."

And that's to say nothing of the pockets

full of cash that attendees routinely carry on them. Anthony Curtis, formerly a professional gambler and currently the owner of Huntington Press, a publisher that specializes in gambling books, figures that it's hardly unusual for partygoers to have five-figure sums stuffed in their pockets. Some of the money goes toward gambling on events that will take place over the course of the evening. More of it, says Rubin, is for friends and collaborators who rarely see one another to settle up. As he puts it, "This is the only place on the planet where over 100 people affiliated on the highest end of blackjack and other gambling opportunities can gather socially without being discovered."

While it's common knowledge here that many card players have made the 21st century move of expanding to capitalize on weaknesses in machine games, nobody is especially forthcoming about exactly what is up. After all, as much as these people are friends, they are also friendly competitors. They angle to capitalize on the same opportunities and deploy similar gambits. No need to tip off the competition too much.

Invitations to the Ball are so coveted that people rally for gaining admission by begging Rubin and his influential friends for plus-ones. One of those influential friends is Edward Thorp, author of *Beat the Dealer*, the book that provided the original blueprint for card counting, which Thorp himself invented. He's become a regular at the ball, functions as a big draw for others and is appropriately treated like royalty. As one guest puts it: "Everybody bows down to Ed—and they should." This year he is on hand to celebrate the publication of his



autobiography, *A Man For All Markets*, which is not a titular exaggeration. Having long ago moved on from cards and casinos, Thorp has devised blackjack-inspired systems for making hundreds of millions of dollars from Wall Street's financial markets.

His rock star status is evident in the excitement felt by normally blasé John Chang (a founding member of the famous MIT blackjack team and a model for Kevin Spacey's character in the movie *21*) when he and a couple of buddies got to play several double-deck rounds with Thorp after a recent Ball. "Considering who he is, playing with Thorp was really amazing," says Chang. Recalling that the inventor of card counting did not get very far out of line, even when the count was high, Chang adds, "In his book, he talked about the importance of getting comfortable in your environment and not pushing things too early. I witnessed him doing that very thing. I moved my bets around, going from \$800 to \$1,200 as the count rose, and he only went up from \$100 to \$200! Apparently, I figured, he's not comfortable playing at this time. We all won, got up from the table, walked away, and Thorp said, 'That's the first time I've played in 40 years.'"

The Ball's guest list is kept tidy by Rubin and his invitation committee, which is made up of Blackjack Hall of Famers. The Hall, believe it or not, is a real thing, with a Cooperstown equivalent at Barona Resort & Casino near San Diego. It's where Rubin consults as a game-protection specialist. There's even a corridor that's been dedicated to blackjack's top practitioners. Guys like James Grosjean, Ken Uston, Richard Munchkin and Bill Benter are well represented. Less-than-revealing photos can be seen on display. "I'm concerned about people knowing how I look," says middle-aged Tommy Hyland, a Hall of Fame member who has been extremely successful at managing teams that beat games around the globe. "So I gave one of my old college pictures. Obviously, I look nothing like that at this point."

The committee makes sure that interlopers and troublemakers are kept out of the party. "A minimum of five Hall of Fame members vet who comes," says Rubin. "Each has veto power and if there is anybody who may cause a problem, they are not allowed in."

It's strict enough that one of the biggest gamblers of the moment was refused an invitation this year because of questions about her associates. Another, who had long attended the ball and was portrayed in the blackjack flick *21*, received the kibosh over suspicions of dodgy behavior. Then there's the esteemed statistician who began working for a major gaming operator, helping executives there to thwart advantage players looking for edges on side bets. "He can't come anymore," Rubin says flatly. "He understands why and is a gentleman about it."

For those who are lucky enough to land invitations, there are just two

requirements: Show up with a bottle of chilled premium Champagne (if you bring a guest, bring two bottles) and agree to never play at Barona, which sponsors the event and underwrites its cost. "That's a genius move on the part of the Barona," says Richard Munchkin, who, like other Hall of Fame members, receives unlimited food, beverage and room comps there. "Whatever the party costs is nothing compared to the money they save by Ball attendees agreeing not to play."

Beyond that, woe to anyone who fails to follow Rubin's carefully worded dictate on the beverage to be brought. "Max is rigid about Champagne," says Joanna Henderson. "Last year I saw him kick someone the fuck out for bringing a split of Champagne. He didn't even tell him to go to the store and buy a full bottle. He just booted him out. One year I brought a single bottle for two people and it wasn't Dom Perignon. Max really let me have it. But after that I always brought Dom—and two bottles."



Because the Ball is a gathering of gamblers, there is Calcutta-style betting set up... Early on, arm wrestling counted among the events in the Player of the Year contest.

The Blackjack Ball began in a small, organic way during the early days of 1997. Fittingly, it was initiated by a casino glitch that benefited the sharpest professional gamblers. For some reason, according to Rubin, MGM Grand chose not to subscribe to the Griffin Book. Produced by a local detective agency, the Book tracked cheaters and advantage players and was a literal book with photos of people that casinos did well to keep off

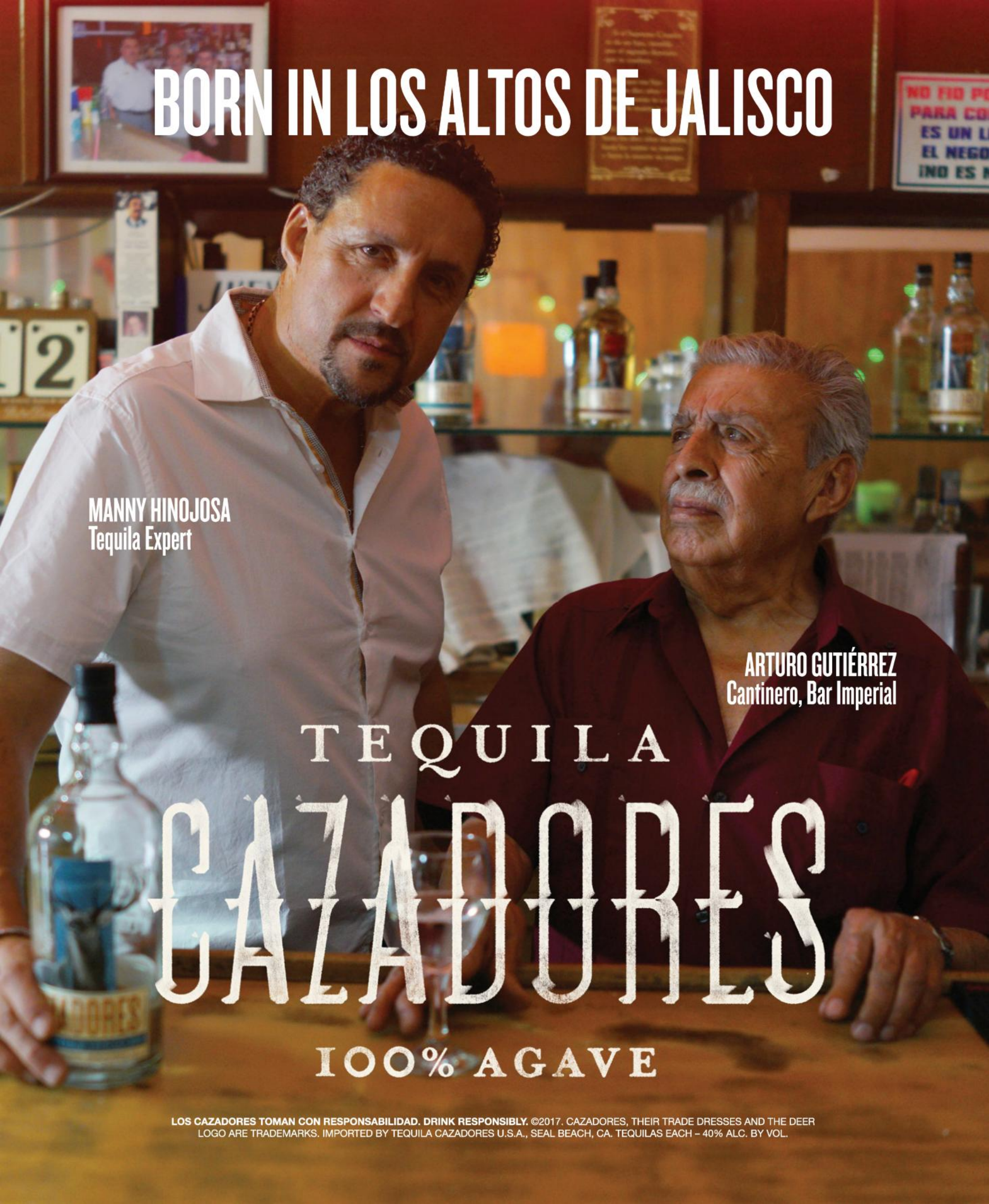
of their tables. At the time, it was the best way to identify card counters and others who played games advantageously.

As a result of the nonexistent system for recognizing gaming-world professionals, MGM had the dubious distinction of attracting all the best blackjack players in the business.

During big weekends and special events—when the casino was particularly crowded—team-members filled the tables and signaled one another to announce counts and call big bettors into the games. "Everybody learned everybody else's signals and the teams were continually

picking each other off and jumping in on one another's action," remembers Rubin. "There was a big fight over this and it got really acrimonious."

Then Rubin, who always seems to be in the thick of things (Rick Blaine, author of *Blackjack Blueprint*, describes Rubin as "a power broker"), offered a solution to aggrieved friends: "I suggested that if somebody picks off the signal from another team, he should pay a fee for joining the game. Everybody started compensating each other and the players became more cooperative. If someone was ace-tracking [which would be hurt by another player jumping into the game], people backed off. Every night they met at Denny's, near the old Sands, and settled up. There were lots of verbal signals. One guy came over and asked what time it was, he was told 13 o'clock [meaning that the count of cards was 13]. Then a bunch

A photograph of two men in a bar. On the left, a man with dark hair and a goatee, wearing a white button-down shirt, looks towards the camera. On the right, an older man with grey hair and a mustache, wearing a dark red button-down shirt, looks off to the side. They are standing behind a bar counter with various bottles and glasses. In the background, there are shelves with more bottles and a sign that reads "NO FID PO PARA CO ES UN L EL NEG INO ES M".

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of low cards came out and the player announced that it was now 17 o'clock. The dealer looked at the guy like he was crazy, but suddenly big bets hit the table and it was all Rembrandts [gambling slang for picture cards] on the next hand."

Rubin remembers there being 35 or 40 top professional players in town at the time. He decided to throw a party on the Saturday after New Year's Eve, which is always a big night for card counters and the like. "The entry fee was a comped bottle of Dom," Rubin says, explaining how the tradition got set. "Some guys even brought the silver ice buckets from their rooms." He adds that this was back in the day when casinos gave out bottles of Champagne the way they now provide chocolates on pillows. Circa 2017, attendees at the Ball are likelier to buy their bottles at Vegas liquor shops than to get them for free from casino hosts.

They're also less likely to get injured during the annual challenge that Rubin puts together (Blaine won it in 2016). From the start, Rubin intended the party to be more than just an occasion to socialize. He included a contest where attendees play to be deemed the greatest blackjack player for the coming year. Competition begins with a trivia contest—which includes tricky brain teasers about the odds of various card playing situations and questions concerning games to be found in casinos that the attendees tend to frequent. The top five finishers there compete in feats of skill that include cutting to a specific number of cards, chip shuffling, pitching cards, playing through various situations and old fashioned card counting.

The first time I attended, back in the early 2000s, I knew very little about the strategies deployed by serious advantage players. So when I saw Richard Munchkin expertly taking down the card-cutting portion of a competition, I thought it was kind of silly, like a cute parlor trick. I had no idea that this skill had earned him loads of money in casinos. But, it should be noted, that year I also won the so-called "jackass trophy." It's a small, cheap memento that has a kicking donkey above the trophy's base. It goes to the person with the lowest trivia-contest score. The first year I attended, that was me.

Because the Ball is a gathering of gamblers, there is Calcutta-style betting set up in which guests bid to wager on the players who they think will win. The prize pool routinely clears \$10,000. Early on, arm wrestling counted among the events in the player of the year contest. A former college wrestler, Anthony Curtis had proven himself to be a tough competitor on that leg of the donnybrook. But when he came up against his buddy Mike Castellano ("Fit as shit" is how Curtis describes him), Curtis knew that he was an underdog.

He had to devise a way of beating Castellano that would not require brute force. "We were going left handed," remembers Curtis. "I looked over my right shoulder and thought I had the perfect way to anchor myself under the table. I hit it at exactly the right second, floored Castellano, and the place was stunned. John Chang saw it happening and took a picture."

People checked out the shot and wondered whether or not Curtis had broken any rules. "I saw it and congratulated Curt," says Castellano. "I figured that what he did was an advantage play. It was allowed within the confines of the Blackjack Ball's rules."

Not long after, though, Curtis confronted an opponent against whom table-holding tricks would not work. "The guy weighed 250 pounds, I did my best to beat him and heard something in my arm crack," recalls Curtis. "He tore my elbow's ligaments. A day later, my whole arm turned black. That was the end of arm wrestling."

The 2017 Blackjack Ball counts as the most star-studded gathering yet. Such a turn is fitting when you consider that it's the 21st annual event, and even the most casual blackjack player knows the importance of the number. Ed Thorp gives a heartfelt speech about loving the game—even though his stock trading algorithms have generated far more money for him than casino gaming ever could—and his talk resulted in a standing ovation.

On his feet, and dominating the front-and-center table, is Don Johnson—not the actor but the former jockey who's used crafty techniques to extract 10s of millions of dollars from blackjack tables across the United States. Poker superstar Phil Ivey sits alongside him. Other gambling world luminaries with intentionally low profiles but staggeringly large bank accounts fill out the remaining seats. Curtis classifies it as the night's "VIP table."

Johnson is particularly keyed up because he is on the ballot for the Blackjack Hall of Fame and views himself as a favorite to get in. He's so confident that he brought his laptop with an acceptance speech on the screen. Ratcheting things up further is the fact that the Hall of Fame winner—decided by voting at the Ball—will receive a 15-liter Nebuchadnezzar of Luc Belaire rosé sparkling wine. Johnson has an endorsement deal with the company and provides the bottle. Maybe a little too optimistic about their guy, the folks at Luc Belaire engraved Johnson's name on the bottle before shipping it over.

Max Rubin holds a very visible black marker, making it clear that if Johnson loses the election, Rubin will black out his name and put in that of the winner. Taking few chances, Johnson has

loaded tables with magazines that contain articles about him. Additionally, he has not been shy about campaigning. "I called all my bros and said, 'Listen, either you vote for me or we are not friends anymore,'" he recalls.

Apparently the strong-arming worked. Johnson won his award and took out a small posse of friends to celebrate. "I think we went to Omnia and it was an easy night," says Johnson who's famous for blowing cash in nightclubs. "It only ran \$50,000."

Less splashy was Anthony Curtis. After coming close many times, he finally took down first place in the Blackjack Ball Player of the Year competition, garnering a giant booze bottle of his own. "There were years where winning would have automatically meant a lot to me," he says. "But by 2017, I wasn't even thinking about it. Then, when I finished first, I was surprisingly happy. It felt like a big deal—and I have the big bottle of Luc Belaire to show for it. Next day there was a party at Munchkin's house. I brought the bottle but we never got around to opening it. Now the Luc Belaire sits in my office, and it feels like a nice trophy to have." ♦

Michael Kaplan is a CIGAR AFICIONADO contributing editor.

The 2017 Blackjack Ball counts as the most star-studded gathering yet. Such a turn is fitting when you consider that it's the 21st annual event, and even the most casual blackjack player knows the importance of the number.

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- Theodore Roosevelt

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Mercedes

Revs Up

Arizona Route 89A is not for the faint of heart. One blind curve flows into another, the hilltops linked by short straights of well-worn asphalt with sheer cliffs menacing on either side. It's the sort of road that locals avoid and tourists dread, a narrow ribbon tracing the mountain spine linking Old West Prescott and New Age Sedona.

Yet another breed is entirely drawn to roads like this. We've spent the last two hours working our way north from Phoenix, skipping the interstate in favor of the more entertaining back roads. Of course, we're not driving a Winnebago or an old pickup. Our car of choice is the new Mercedes-AMG GT C Roadster.

Only the second model ever designed specifically for the Mercedes performance brand-within-a-brand, the GT C puts 550-horsepower at the command of one's right foot, enough to tear from 0 to 60 in 3.8 seconds. But this is no classic muscle car. It delivers the sort of precise steering and handling expected from a racecar. As you carve the curves you're encouraged to pick up your pace, with only the occasional encounter with a nervous traveler holding you back.

"It's the sort of car that will change your perception of Mercedes-Benz," says Larry Printz, a judge at numerous classic car shows, who is along for the ride in the convertible. For a long time, Mercedes was the 'old man's German car,'" he says, better known for a plush, if uninspiring, ride than for its performance and handling. These days, contends Printz, products like the GT C are helping redefine the brand, delivering "some of the best-handling cars in the world."

Don't worry, if a high-performance two-seater isn't quite your style, the German maker still offers plenty of other options, from the surprisingly affordable little GLA crossover-utility vehicle to the big Mercedes-Maybach S600 sedan, about as close as you can come to a business jet on wheels. There are sedans and coupes, as well as coupe-like sedans and a growing list of classic SUVs and car-based CUVs that balance on- and off-road manners.

And for those who might disdain the big, gas-guzzling V-8s and V-12s that have long powered products with the tri-star on their grilles, Mercedes is rolling out an array of new high-tech, higher-mileage alternatives. By the end of this year, it plans to offer 10 plug-in hybrids in its global fleet, as well as an assortment of more conventional hybrids. At last year's Paris Motor Show, Dieter Zetsche, the head of the Mercedes brand and CEO of parent Daimler AG, pulled the covers off the Mercedes Generation EQ

With its AMG line, the diverse German carmaker with a reputation for luxury bolsters a knack for performance

BY PAUL A. EISENSTEIN

Concept. Mercedes-EQ is going to be the name of another new sub-brand focused on the pure battery-electric and other plug-based models that many experts believe could dominate the global luxury car market in the decades to come.

If that isn't a broad enough assortment, the Teutonic team has been hinting at more to come with concept vehicles like the Mercedes F 015, essentially a living room on wheels. What just a decade ago might have seemed a fantasy in chrome is now meant to be seen as "the forerunner of a mobility revolution," according to Zetsche, and likely to influence the first fully driverless vehicle Daimler plans to bring to market by 2021.

How far the company has come since 1885 when Karl Benz rolled out his Patent-Motorwagen, considered the world's first true automobile. Many now credit Karl's wife Bertha with turning the Motorwagen into the foundation of a successful enterprise. Without advising her husband, she made a perilous, 121-mile trip to visit her family, proving the one-cylinder, two-horsepower buggy's viability. Upon her return, she offered engineering advice—and also lent her husband money from her family fortune to put the Motorwagen into production. Last year, Bertha Benz was inaugurated into the Automotive Hall of Fame in Dearborn, Michigan.

Just 60 miles away, Gottlieb Daimler was perfecting something dubbed the "Grandfather Clock." He used the gasoline engine to power the Petroleum Reitwagen he built in 1885. The two men quickly became bitter competitors, battling over patent rights. It was only in 1926, a quarter-century after Daimler's death and a few years before Benz's, that the companies merged. First called Daimler-Benz, it soon adopted the name Mercedes-Benz, incorporating the title of an early Daimler model that the Austrian automotive pioneer Emil Jellinek had developed and named for his daughter.



The Mercedes lineup features models for most every driver including the AMG GT C roadster (top) aimed at high performance, the traditionally luxurious S-Class sedan (below left) and the EQ (below right), which is a plug-in, pure-battery electric vehicle.



The corporate name would change once again with the 1998 “merger of equals” that became DaimlerChrysler AG. It was anything but equal, however, and certainly not a success. Daimler dumped the old Chrysler Corp. in 2007, just as the U.S. economy started to collapse. It was a painful and financially damaging divorce, but it marked a major turning point for what emerged as Daimler AG.

More than 130 years after Karl Benz and Gottlieb Daimler rolled out their first, primitive cars, the automaker remains based in Stuttgart. The quaint, southern German city has grown rich off the hometown manufacturer, which employs a sizable share of the local workforce through Daimler’s corporate offices, design and engineering center and local assembly operations. But the carmaker also operates product development and manufacturing operations in the U.S., China, South Africa and a variety of other locales. It’s the sort of empire needed by a company that last year sold 2.2 million vehicles, a 10 percent year-over-year increase, making Mercedes the largest luxury car brand in the world.

The Daimler empire covers a lot of territory—and a lot of brands. There’s Smart, producer of urban microcars like the Smart Fortwo, plus an array of military vehicle, bus and truck marques, including the U.S.-based Freightliner. And there’s that growing list of Mercedes sub-brands.

For years, Mercedes was content to maintain a modest automotive product portfolio, with only a handful of models like those now known as the E- and S-Class. There was a near revolt within its supervisory board when the idea of a compact luxury car was first introduced. The proponents won and the 1993 Baby Benz—the grandfather of today’s C-Class—proved an immediate hit.

How times have changed. These days, Mercedes is intent on filling seemingly every possible “white space,” as product planners like to call it. Along with the classic C-, E- and S-Class sedans, coupes, wagons and convertibles, Mercedes showrooms are now filled with the likes of the coupe-like CLA and CLS sedans, the G, GLC and GLE utility vehicles, the SL and SLC roadsters, among others. It’s a veritable war as parent Daimler rushes to counter the moves made by key competitors BMW and Audi, both of which have announced plans to bring dozens of their own new models to market before the end of the decade.

Mercedes now has organized its model range into three sub-brands, with a fourth coming. That starts with the familiar Mercedes-Benz marque which will cover the company’s mainstream models, like the recently updated 2017 E-Class and the 2018 S450 sedan set to reach showrooms this autumn.

As lavish as the S-Class might seem, Mercedes has long aimed to connect with the luxury market’s most elite buyers. In 1997, it introduced Maybach as a standalone marque that it hoped would compete with the likes of Bentley and Rolls-Royce. But the brand fell far short of expectations and, in 2011, CEO Zetsche announced plans to kill off Maybach. Three years later, it was given a reprieve, although its rebirth was less audacious. The Mercedes-Maybach badge adorns the most exclusive versions of the S-Class, and the G-Class SUV, vehicles that push well north of \$250,000 on the price sticker.

Where might Mercedes take Maybach next? At a full 18.7 feet, and painted in a vibrant, eye-catching red, the Vision Mercedes-Maybach 6 made its debut at the 2016 Pebble Beach Concours d’Elegance. While the maker bristles at the term, “retro,” there is no question the striking show car delves into the brand’s past for inspiration, says Davis Lee, the senior

designer who gets credit for the concept. “Fundamental beauty never changes,” he explains, adding that, “This is very true” to Mercedes’ history, and just might hint at something in the works.

As for the highest performers within the family, they now wear the Mercedes-AMG badge. AMG was founded in 1967 by former Mercedes engineers Hans Werner Aufrecht and Erhard Melcher—the “G” in the company’s name standing for Grossaspach, where Aufrecht was born. They originally set out to build a faster Mercedes racecar but quickly started producing limited-edition versions of the German automaker’s street vehicles.

The top of the S-Class family is the S65 sedan, with its massive 621-hp V-12 engine. It may be plush but it’ll also make your neck snap when you slam the pedal to the floor. And to help deliver all their power to the pavement, most AMG models will come with standard all-wheel-drive going forward.

The proliferation of new AMG models might come as a surprise to those who remember an earlier era, when Mercedes would offer only one of the performance models at a time, and usually for just a limited run. It wasn’t uncommon, back in the 1990s, for the likes of an AMG-tuned E-Class to command a higher price on the used car market than it did when it originally rolled out of the showroom.

While most AMG offerings are retuned versions of stock Mercedes-Benz models, the GT recently became the second model specifically designed only to carry the AMG badge, following up on the earlier AMG SLS supercar. “It can be kind of a beast—like *Beauty and the Beast*,”



Maybach, once a standalone brand, is now solidly in the Mercedes fold and includes the G650 (top). The driverless concept car F 015 (bottom) has swivel seats that may become a feature in future production models.

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BOLD | FULL | 91 POINTS

WARNING: Smoking cigars regularly poses risks of cancer of the mouth, throat, larynx, and esophagus similar to smoking cigarettes.

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The Vision Mercedes-Maybach 6, a concept car, recalls elements of the company's design esthetic with gullwing doors.



laughed GT program director Jörg Letzel, as we dutifully returned from our drive up to Sedona a few months back. Offered in both coupe and roadster form, Mercedes recently revealed that still more variants are in the works when it unveiled the AMG GT Concept at the 2017 Geneva Motor Show. Expect to see “a four-door variant,” announced the sub-brand’s Chairman Tobias Moers.

Some things will never change, Moers stressed. The engine in each AMG vehicle is produced by a single technician whose name is stamped onto the block. But the GT Concept suggests that the type of engines AMG uses could soon go through some dramatic changes. The Geneva show car not only added another pair of doors but what AMG officials described as a “performance hybrid powertrain” capable of thrusting out 805 horsepower—enough to launch the show car from 0 to 60 in less than three seconds. The system, officials have privately confirmed, is based on the Kinetic Energy Recovery Systems, or KERS, technology developed by Mercedes for its winning Formula One team.

Don’t be surprised to see KERS technology show up in a production model in the near future. Indeed, Mercedes is spending billions of dollars to develop a range of alternative propulsion technologies that will meet the strict new emissions and mileage standards going into effect around the world. Those include hybrids, plug-ins, battery-electric vehicles, advanced diesels and even hydrogen fuel-cell vehicles. The good news is that many of these new powertrains will deliver enhanced performance, as well as lower emissions and higher fuel efficiency.

Expect to see some of the more advanced of these powertrains land in the new Mercedes-EQ brand. “The emission-free automobile is the future,” said Daimler CEO Zetsche during the Generation EQ’s Paris preview.

But that show car didn’t stop with a battery drivetrain, stressed Zetsche, pointing out that “our new EQ brand (will go) far beyond electric vehicles. EQ stands for a comprehensive ecosystem of services, technologies and innovations.” Going forward, Mercedes will focus on four pillars, according to the CEO, “connected, autonomous, shared and electric.” Their initials make a “CASE” for a number of trends reshaping the global

industry, all captured within the Generation EQ concept—and other recent prototypes like the F 015.

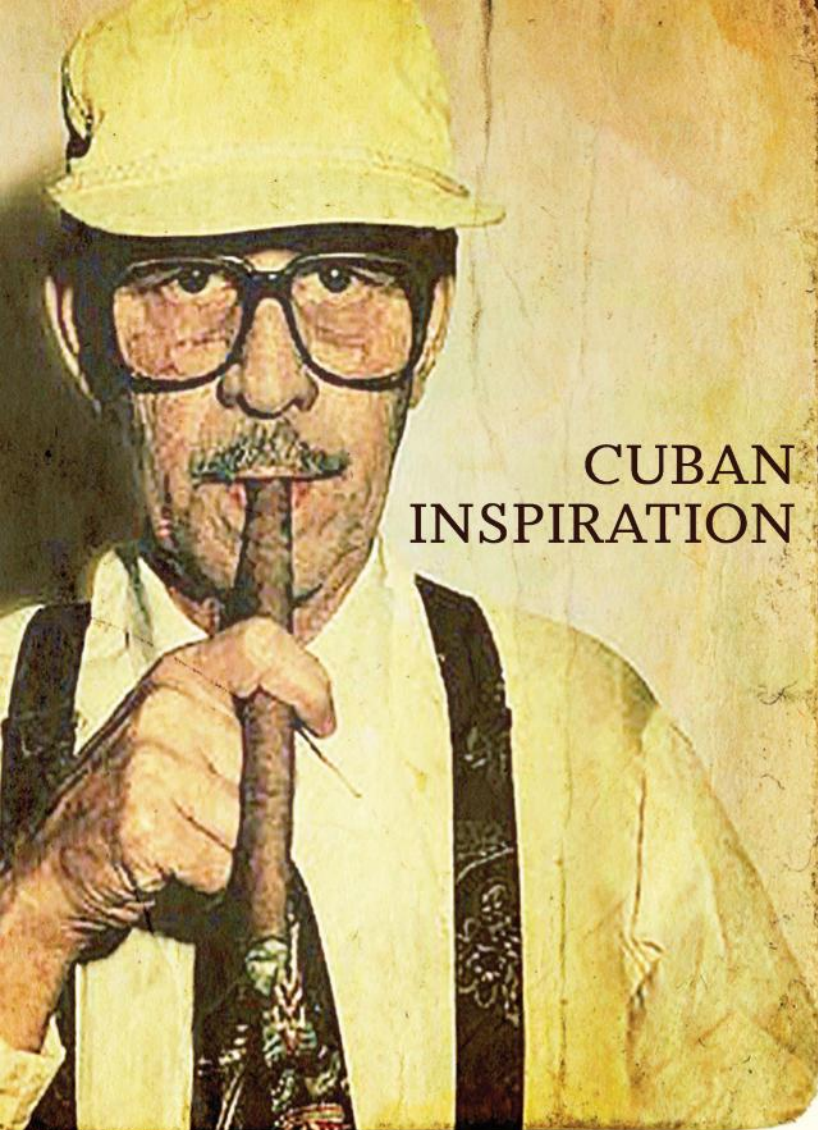
You don’t have to wait to get an idea of what’s coming. The Mercedes-Benz S-Class is arguably the most technologically sophisticated vehicle ever to go into mass production. The outgoing model already features infrared night vision capable of spotting animals, pedestrians and other obstacles beyond the range of normal headlights—and an automatic braking system that can bring the car to a stop if the driver fails to respond. The 2018 update adds features like Active Steering Assist; tap the turn signal and it will pass slower vehicles without you needing to touch the steering wheel.

According to a new study by Navigant Research, Mercedes is running one of the industry’s most advanced autonomous vehicle programs. Not content to stop with vehicles that must have a backup “operator” behind the wheel, it plans to have a completely driverless vehicle in production by 2021. Like the F 015 concept, it’s likely to feature seats that can swivel 180 degrees, so riders can face one another as if in a mobile living room. It remains to be seen if such vehicles will be sold directly to the public.

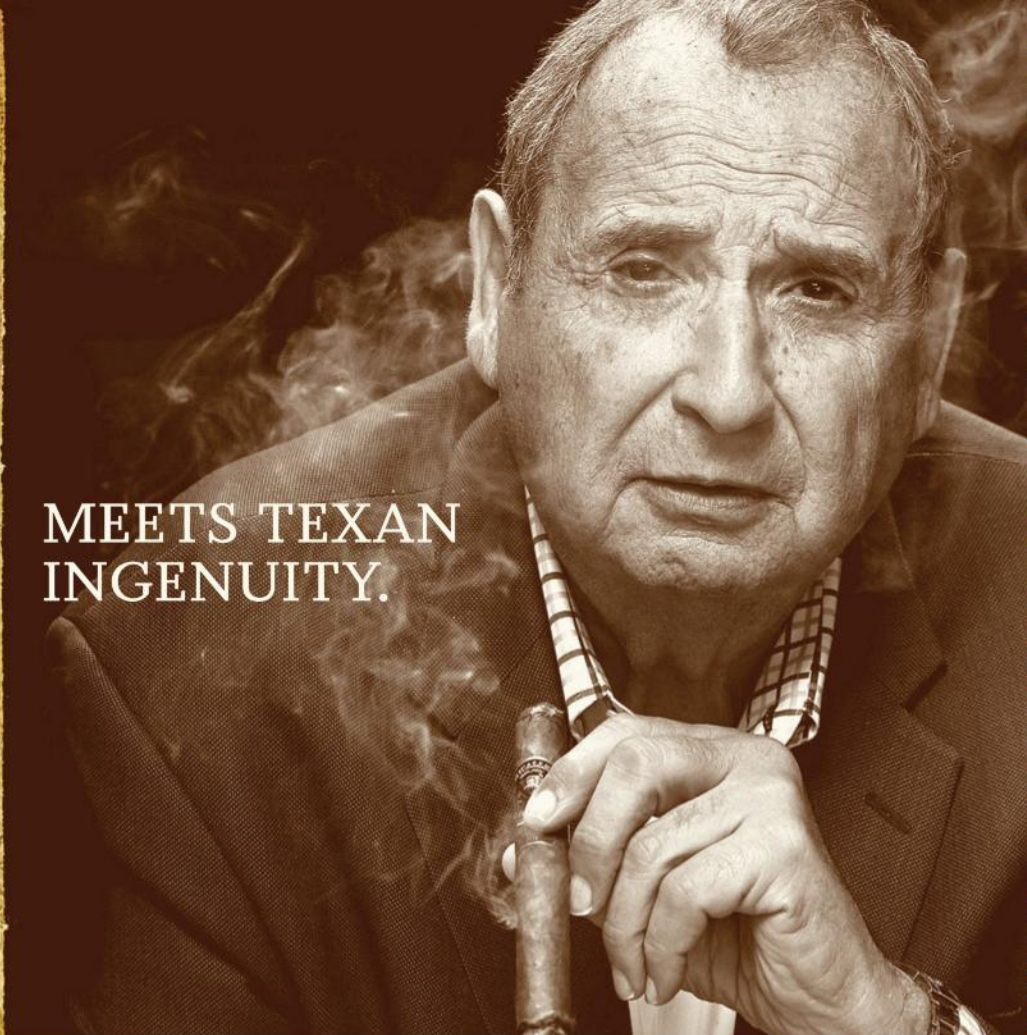
Significantly, parent Daimler recently announced a partnership with ride-sharing giant Uber, which has an aggressive self-driving vehicle program of its own in the works. Many experts—including Zetsche—are betting that, by 2030, millions of motorists will opt to use services like Uber, rather than owning and operating vehicles of their own, especially in dense urban areas. Daimler wants to make sure that if you’re calling for a ride and can afford the up-charge, you’ll opt for a Mercedes.

That said, there are likely to always be those who will want to keep their eyes on the road and their hands on the wheel. And for them, Daimler wants to make sure a Mercedes-Benz, Mercedes-Maybach or Mercedes-AMG will remain the car of choice. The German maker, which lays claim to having invented the automobile in the first place, is intent on leading, rather than following in an era of dramatic change that could yet reshape the industry in ways unseen. ❖

Paul A. Eisenstein publishes www.TheCarConnection.com.



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cigars



- 112 CIGAR REVIEW: 80 BLIND TASTINGS**
In our latest lineup, our panel of cigar-puffing editors takes on an assortment of 80 cigars to see how they rate in a blind taste test.
- 126 A PERFECT SMOKE**
A pre-Castro Cuban puts on a 100-point performance in this edition of Connoisseur's Corner. Also, several big Cubans perform well, as do a pair of aged, standout cigars from the Dominican Republic and Miami.
- 128 OLD SEEDS, NEW TRICKS**
The newest thing in cigar tobacco begins with something old—heirloom seeds saved from generations ago. Tobacco men are looking to these old seeds for new flavors and bringing back a taste of the good old days.
- 136 A GREAT NIGHT FOR CHARITY**
CIGAR AFICIONADO's Night to Remember dinner brought together cigar lovers in an evening of amazing generosity, raising \$1.6 million for prostate cancer research.
- 141 THE BIG SMOKE RETURNS TO MIAMI**
Scenes from The Big Smoke Miami, home to more handmade cigarmakers than any other city.

JEFF HARRIS



Altadis U.S.A. has taken aggressive steps to ensure that its heritage brands stay relevant in the world of premium cigars. Romeo 505 Nicaragua by Romeo y Julieta is a perfect example. The Churchill scored 91 points and is a creative collaboration between Altadis and the Plasencia family, one of Nicaragua's most prolific growers of tobacco. In this case, both parties stand to benefit. Altadis not only gets a fresh, new interpretation of its Romeo y Julieta line, but can now boast its first truly Nicaraguan Romeo—the Romeo 505 tobacco is all-Nicaraguan and made in Nicaragua as well. The Plasencias, in turn, get to showcase their tobacco using the platform of a major, national brand. The consumer gets a rich and flavorful cigar without paying too much money. Everybody wins. If the La Historia E-III by E.P. Carrillo looks familiar, it's because it was named the No. 2 Cigar of 2014 by this magazine. At 90 points, the cigar is still performing well. The Cuban Montecristo Dantés Edición Limitada 2016 also scored 90 points. It's late—it was supposed to come out in 2016, but didn't appear on the market until earlier this year.



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ROMEO 505 NICARAGUA BY ROMEO Y JULIETA CHURCHILL

A gorgeous Churchill wrapped in a dark, oily cover leaf. The sweet, cedary smoke also shows savory notes of leather with hints of roasted nuts and black pepper.
U.S.: \$10.50 U.K.: N/A

91



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6 7/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: MEXICO

E.P. CARRILLO LA HISTORIA E-III

The leathery, cedary intonations of this cigar are balanced by a caramel and nutmeg sweetness. It builds to an earthy finish.
U.S.: \$10.40 U.K.: N/A

90



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 6 5/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: OCTOBER 2016

MONTECRISTO DANTÉS EDICIÓN LIMITADA 2016

A large cigar with an even draw. There's a sweet-and-salty character to the smoke, with some earthy notes, a touch of graham cracker and a cinnamon finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £32.10

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 49 LENGTH: 6 3/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ASHTON SYMMETRY PRESTIGE

Softly pressed with a flat head and attractive wrapper. Initial notes are bready and yeasty with notes of light chocolate and pecan before a tangy, woody finish.
U.S.: \$12.75 U.K.: N/A

89



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 7 1/4"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA,
DOM. REP.
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

HOYO DE MONTERREY EXCALIBUR NO. 1 MADURO

Big, predominant notes of cedar usher in a leathery, meaty smoke that becomes tangy, especially on the finish.
U.S.: \$8.19 U.K.: N/A

89

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7 1/4"

FILLER: DOM. REP.

BINDER: DOM. REP.

WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA GALERA 1936 BOX PRESSED CHURCHILL

Notably tangy with strong notes of leather and cedar, this Churchill becomes more subdued, showing an herbal finish.

U.S.: \$8.50 U.K.: N/A

89

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 7"

FILLER: NICARAGUA

BINDER: NICARAGUA

WRAPPER: ECUADOR

PADRÓN DÁMASO NO. 17

A large, blondish Churchill that's sweet and fruity with woody, floral undertones a nutty finish. It's a mild cigar, but flavorful.

U.S.: \$17.50 U.K.: N/A

89

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"

FILLER: NICARAGUA

BINDER: NICARAGUA

WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

MY FATHER LE BIJOU 1922 CHURCHILL

Earthy and full-bodied, this dark Churchill also imparts hints of mesquite and leather. Some metallic notes and dry wood affected the score.

U.S.: \$11.90 U.K.: N/A

88

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"

FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA

BINDER: DOM. REP.

WRAPPER: HONDURAS

NAT SHERMAN TIMELESS COLLECTION CHURCHILL

A cedary, leathery Churchill with some intermittent tart, oily notes and a bready, earthy finish that's fairly full bodied.

U.S.: \$9.00 U.K.: N/A

88

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 47 LENGTH: 7"

FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA,
PERU

BINDER: DOM. REP.

WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA AURORA 1495 CHURCHILL

Somewhat of a muted cigar, this streaky cigar delivers thin notes of lemongrass and wood before the mild floral finish. Could use more body.

U.S.: \$8.00 U.K.: N/A

87

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 7"

FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.

BINDER: ECUADOR

WRAPPER: ECUADOR

UNDERCROWN SHADE CORONA DOBLE

Big and blond with a near-perfect burn and solid white ash. It's a grassy, woody Churchill with a vague nuttiness and reedy finish. A mild cigar.

U.S.: \$9.79 U.K.: N/A

87

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"

FILLER: DOM. REP.

BINDER: DOM. REP.

WRAPPER: MEXICO

HAMMER + SICKLE TRADEMARK SERIES MADURO CHURCHILL

A dark Churchill with a reddish tint, and notably firm draw. Notes of clove, earth and cinnamon come through, but the draw and body could be more substantial.

U.S.: \$9.25 U.K.: N/A

86

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"

FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA

BINDER: NICARAGUA

WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ROMEO Y JULIETA RESERVA REAL CHURCHILL

Tart minerals underscore touches of chocolate and earth, but the finish of this cigar is laden with recurring mineral notes.

U.S.: \$7.73 U.K.: N/A

86

corona gordas

While the name Ventura Cigar Co. may not be known to every cigar enthusiast, the Archetype Axis Mundi brand might be more easily recognizable. The Toro scored 93 points thanks to the creative blending of Drew Estate in Nicaragua, where the cigar is made. Archetype consists of four different brands, Axis Mundi being one of the more full-bodied blends in the Archetype portfolio. According to Ventura, the cigar was named for the repeating characters (or archetypes) that recur in the dreams of all people and myths of all cultures. Both the Honduran Eiroa The First 20 Years 54 x 6 Prensado and Nicaraguan Rocky Patel Special Edition Robusto scored 92 points.



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: INDONESIA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ARCHETYPE AXIS MUNDI TORO

Rollled with a dark and toothy cover leaf, this cigar exhibits a rich vanilla, nut and caramel quality, balanced by hints of cedar and coffee bean. A delicious smoke.
U.S.: \$12 U.K.: N/A

93



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: HONDURAS
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

EIROA THE FIRST 20 YEARS 54 X 6 PRENSADO

Pressed and oily, this dark maduro delivers a chewy, concentrated smoke fortified with notes of nougat, cloves and sweet star anise. The finish resonates with leather and wood.
U.S.: \$13.36 U.K.: N/A

92



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ROCKY PATEL SPECIAL EDITION ROBUSTO

Neatly pressed into rectangular form, this cigar shows a tasty balance of earth and nuttiness, leaving clear impressions of chocolate-covered almonds, roasted coffee bean and a tangy cedar finish.
U.S.: \$10.45 U.K.: N/A

92



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ILLUSIONE HAUT 10 ROBUSTO EXTRA

Crafted with a three-seam fantail cap, this attractive cigar shows notes of almond, hickory wood and vanilla bean before a long, cinnamon and almond paste finish.
U.S.: \$15.95 U.K.: N/A

91



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

ROCKY PATEL DARK DOMINICAN SUPREMO

Wearing a dark, near oscuro wrapper, this cigar exhibits a rich, earthy character and caramel sweetness with underlying toastiness. The finish hints of crème brûlée.
U.S.: \$10.50 U.K.: N/A

91



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

CORNELIUS & ANTHONY VENGANZA SILENCER

This attractive, gleaming cigar shows notes of caramel and vanilla bean that are underscored by touches of cedar and sassafras.
U.S.: \$9.15 U.K.: N/A

90

**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: DECEMBER 2016

PUNCH PUNCH 48

First puffs of this cigar are woody and floral with lots of hazelnut and pecan impressions. Notes of bread and cinnamon also develop.

U.S.: N/A SWITZ.: 15.50 Sw. Fr.

90**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. HABANO
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

PUNCH SIGNATURE PITA

The smoke of this dark, oily cigar is bold and hearty with prominent notes of oak and earth that hint of cappuccino and toffee. The finish is pleasantly sweet.

U.S.: \$6.99 U.K.: N/A

90**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

VIAJE EXCLUSIVO NICARAGUA CG

Crafted with a closed foot and a well-made cap, this slim cigar offers bold impressions of cocoa bean and leather. The finish suggests a raisin sweetness.

U.S.: \$8.40 U.K.: N/A

90**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.,
HONDURAS
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

CAMACHO CHECK SIX TORO

The large, visible pores of this rosy wrapper give it a slightly rustic appearance. It's a sweet and bready smoke with hints of earth and oak leading to a mineral finish.

U.S.: \$12.50 U.K.: N/A

89**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

**E.P. CARRILLO SHORT RUN 2016
NICARAGUA SUPER ROBUSTO**

A ruddy-hued cigar made with a three-seam cap and a very soft head. It's primarily woody and charry, leaving hints of leather and minerals on the palate.

U.S.: \$13.50 U.K.: N/A

88**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MAY 2014

JUAN LOPEZ SELECCIÓN NO. 1

There are lots of stains and green spots on the wrapper of this medium-claro robusto, but it draws and burns evenly. Its leather notes and cinnamon sweetness dissipate, leaving a chalky finish.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £18.83

88**BRAZIL**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: BRAZIL
BINDER: BRAZIL
WRAPPER: BRAZIL

VILLIGER SAN'DORO MADURO TORO

Woody and floral, this reddish-brown toro becomes notably sharp, leaving a slightly acidic finish.

U.S.: \$8.60 U.K.: N/A

87**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

**J. FUEGO 777 MADURO SILVER
CORONA GORDA**

A predominantly woody, oaky smoke with hints of licorice and a flinty, mineral finish. It draws and burns evenly.

U.S.: \$6.75 U.K.: N/A

86

figurados

From pressed perfectos to tapered torpedos, this category has a preponderance of high-scoring cigars, but two near-classic smokes flirted with perfection. Each scored 94 points and both came from two legendary producers. Made in the Dominican Republic, the Arturo Fuente Don Carlos Eye of the Shark is so named because of its shape—the lower half is box-pressed, the upper half round and tapering to a point, giving it a curiously sharky appearance. Eye of the Shark is attached to the Don Carlos line, but brand-owner Carlos “Carlito” Fuente is a consummate tinkerer when it comes to his cigars, and he’s changed the blend for this unusual shape. The result is a resoundingly complex cigar that’s as interesting to look at as it is to smoke. Padrón, on the other hand, decided to go all the way with its box-pressing. The Serie 1926 No. 2 is a fully-pressed cigar with a belicoso tip. There’s something about its blend of Nicaraguan tobaccos, the trunk-shaped form and the tapered head that all conspire to deliver a dense, earthy smoke rich in elemental flavors. It achieves an uncommon balance of rusticity and refinement.



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 3/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

**ARTURO FUENTE DON CARLOS
EYE OF THE SHARK**

An attractive torpedo with a squarely pressed foot. Its lush draw delivers big notes of cedar, nuts and leather with a finish that smacks of cider. Tasty and complex.
U.S.: \$12.25 U.K.: N/A

94



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PADRÓN SERIE 1926 NO. 2

A box-pressed belicoso with a nipple tip. Strong earth and coffee notes lend richness to the smoke while its woody, strong black tea finish make this cigar balanced and delicious.
U.S.: \$17.70 U.K.: N/A

94



U.S.A.
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

**CASA FERNANDEZ AGANORSA LEAF
TORPEDO**

The salted caramel and chocolate notes of this box-pressed torpedo have the rich sweetness of a candy bar. The finish is woody and light.
U.S.: \$8.20 U.K.: N/A

92



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: CAMEROON
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ENCLAVE FIGURADO

Sweet and rich like a candy bar, this big figurado imparts a dense, chewy smoke with plenty of cocoa bean and a long fresh tobacco finish. A medium to full-bodied cigar.
U.S.: \$7.60 U.K.: N/A

92



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

**REGIUS EXCLUSIVO U.S.A.
PRESSED PERFECTO**

An interesting, box-pressed perfecto whose even, open draw offers plenty of earthy cocoa notes balanced by pistachio nuttiness, hints of lemon peel and a sweet woody finish.
U.S.: \$12.95 U.K.: N/A

92

	HONDURAS RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/8" FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA BINDER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA WRAPPER: HONDURAS	ALEC BRADLEY MUNDIAL NO. 5 Made with a rounded head, multiseamed cap and tapered foot, this figurado shows bold notes of semi-sweet chocolate, sweet wood and nuts. A rich and tasty cigar. U.S.: \$9.00 U.K.: N/A	91
	CUBA RING GAUGE: 57 LENGTH: 7 1/4" FILLER: CUBA BINDER: CUBA WRAPPER: CUBA BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2016	CUABA SALOMON This salomon is heavily creased from the cigar mold. It's a floral, woody smoke with an underlying nuttiness. A pleasant and medium-bodied cigar. U.S.: N/A U.K.: £38.93	90
	HONDURAS RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/4" FILLER: NICARAGUA BINDER: HONDURAS WRAPPER: MEXICO	PADILLA VINTAGE RESERVE FIGURADO A neatly box-pressed, double-tapered salomon whose sweet, earthy smoke carries hints of molasses, wood and coffee. U.S.: \$9.00 U.K.: N/A	90
	CUBA RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8" FILLER: CUBA BINDER: CUBA WRAPPER: CUBA BOX DATE: OCTOBER 2015	PARTAGÁS SERIE P NO. 2 Light, nuanced woodiness becomes more pronounced, picking up light chocolate notes, leather and a malty finish. A medium-bodied torpedo. U.S.: N/A U.K.: £26.06	90
	NICARAGUA RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 4 1/2" FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA BINDER: MEXICO WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF	THE TABERNACLE TORPEDO Draped in an oily, dark wrapper, this tiny belicoso burns evenly. It offers notes of rich woods, cocoa and hints of salt and pepper. The finish is long and sweet. U.S.: \$10.50 U.K.: N/A	90
	DOMINICAN REPUBLIC RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5" FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA BINDER: DOM. REP. WRAPPER: ECUADOR	LA AURORA PREFERIDOS 1903 EDICION DOUBLE BARREL AGED PERFECTO A beautiful old-fashioned perfecto with plenty of leather and strong cocoa bean notes. The finish is earthy and rustic. U.S.: \$22.50 U.K.: N/A	89
	DOMINICAN REPUBLIC RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8" FILLER: DOM. REP. BINDER: DOM. REP. WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE	MONTECRISTO CLASSIC NO. 2 Mild and slightly sweet, showing tea and vanilla cookie notes that become a bit heavier with breadiness, and a hint of marshmallow. U.S.: \$15.70 U.K.: N/A	87
	HONDURAS RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8" FILLER: COSTA RICA, NICARAGUA BINDER: NICARAGUA WRAPPER: NICARAGUA	GRAN HABANO COROJO NO. 5 PYRAMID An earthy pyramid with lemon and vanilla notes that become a bit sour. The finish hints of bread and damp mushroom. U.S.: \$7.30 U.K.: N/A	84

miscellaneous

This category is an assortment of mostly squat, fat cigars that have been rolled for the express purpose of delivering large volumes of smoke in short periods of time. A few deviate from that mission, most notably, the Alec Bradley Post Embargo Lancero, our category leader. It scored 92 points. At a thickness of 41 ring gauge, it's just a bit too fat to fit the girth parameters of our panetela category, so here it stands, a thin baton among these dwarfish cigars. The sweet and savory aspects of this lancero's smoke are brought together by an intermittent earthiness that adds balance and body. Note its two binders, one from Honduras, the other, Nicaragua. The Cohiba Medio Siglo is the first addition to the brand's Linea 1492 (aka the Siglo Series) in 15 years. It scored 91 points and has the length of a Siglo I and the thickness of a Siglo VI. While the cigar was introduced at the 2016 Habanos Festival, there was little commercial trace of the Medio Siglo until this year. The Ashton Virgin Sun Grown Trés Mystique, which scored 90 points, has been on the market for years. It's made by the Fuentes in the Dominican Republic.



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 41 LENGTH: 7 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

ALEC BRADLEY POST EMBARGO LANCERO

The wrapper of this long, thin cigar gleams with oil. Savory notes of leather and briny olive take on a malty earthiness before a sweet finish redolent of chocolate-covered raisins.

U.S.: \$8.50 U.K.: N/A

92



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: N/A

COHIBA MEDIO SIGLO

A short robusto with a substantial draw and even burn. It starts out a bit peppery but becomes floral and creamy before developing nuttiness with a hint of cinnamon.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £26.60

91



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 4 3/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ASHTON VIRGIN SUN GROWN TRÉS MYSTIQUE

Solidly rolled with a dark, streaky wrapper, this little smoke has a firm draw but imparts a bright, zesty smoke full of cedar notes, hints of orange blossom and a bit of butterscotch, though the finish is a bit dry.

U.S.: \$9.80 U.K.: N/A

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 3 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

A. FLORES GRAN RESERVA 1975 HALF CORONA

First puffs of this little corona are cedary and slightly acidic before taking on strong notes of earth and coffee. Touches of cinnamon emerge as well.

U.S.: \$5.09 U.K.: N/A

89



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 45 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

COHIBA NICARAGUA N45

A dark little robusto with an oily wrapper and sweet smoke that exhibits a molasses and licorice sweetness and a reedy finish.

U.S.: \$11.49 U.K.: N/A

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 3 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

**DAVIDOFF 702 SERIES
ANIVERSARIO ENTREACTO**

Draped in an oily brown wrapper, this tiny cigar has a lush draw that delivers earthy notes with hints of leather, nougat and tangy citrus.

U.S.: \$11.40 U.K.: N/A

89



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 3 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JULY 2016

H. UPMANN HALF CORONA

Small and stubby with a lopsided cap, this cigar begins floral and bready before picking up a salty earthiness. The finish leaves a bit of grit on the palate.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £10.08

89



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: BRAZIL

NUB MADURO 460

The wild, woodland underbrush twang of this short, squat robusto combines notes of earth, bark and freshly dug roots before a tangy finish.

U.S.: \$8.09 U.K.: N/A

89



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 4 3/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2016

**RAMON ALLONES
PATAGON EXCLUSIVO CONO SUR**

An attractive petit robusto crafted with a three-seam cap. First puffs are floral, but the cigar warms to show stronger notes of spice, leather and a hint of licorice.

U.S.: N/A CHILE/ARGENTINA: \$22.00

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 58 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: CAMEROON
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

FRATELLO ORO SHORTY

The initial flintiness of this smoke dissipates giving way to earthy and rich woody notes. The draw and burn are lush and even.

U.S.: \$8.00 U.K.: N/A

88



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 3 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

**LAST CALL MADURO BY A.J. FERNANDEZ
CHIQUITAS**

Rolled with a dark wrapper and uncut foot, this cigar is spicy and earthy with hints of licorice and leather, and a touch of bitterness on the finish.

U.S.: \$4.46 U.K.: N/A

88



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 3 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA BOHÉME MIMI

A small, half-sized cigar that burns a bit hot. It's salty and brassy with a touch of wood. Medium to full-bodied.

U.S.: \$7.25 U.K.: N/A

87



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

**PERDOMO SMALL BATCH SERIES
MADURO HALF CORONA**

Covered in a spotty, matte wrapper, this cigar offers a nougat sweetness, but leaves the palate dry with notes of walnut shell, cereal and a woody, reedy finish.

U.S.: \$5.00 U.K.: N/A

87

petit coronas

Once a large Cuban brand with many sizes, Por Larrañaga today is made up of only two or three regular-production cigars. Rather than mourning the loss of discontinued vitolas, we'd rather celebrate what's left—a delicious Petit Corona that scored 91 points. These particular samples were produced in May 2016, so there's plenty of aging potential should you choose to put them away for awhile. Made in Nicaragua, the Oliva Serie O No. 4 scored 90 points. Once owned by the Oliva family, these cigars are now owned by J. Cortés, which purchased the company last year. The Cuban Romeo y Julieta Romeo No. 2 scored 90 points as well and comes in a handy aluminum tube. The Cuban Romeo y Julieta Romeo No. 2 scored 90 points as well and comes in a handy aluminum tube.



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MAY 2016

POR LARRAÑAGA PETIT CORONA

There's a salty, nutty quality to this veiny petit corona that remains medium-bodied throughout. Hints of walnut shell lead to an oaky finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £12.01

91



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

OLIVA SERIE O NO. 4

Fairly dark in appearance, this neatly rolled petit corona combines the spicy notes of white pepper, cumin and cardamom with a malty, light cocoa character.
U.S.: \$5.63 U.K.: N/A

90



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JULY 2016

ROMEO Y JULIETA ROMEO NO. 2 (TUBO)

The overpacked head of this little cigar causes a firm draw, but it still imparts lots of leather, toast and ginger-snap notes.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £15.15

90



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 4 3/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

CASA MAGNA COLORADO PIKITO

A dark, oily petit corona with a slight reddish hue. The dense smoke imparts tart, earthiness balanced by nutty notes and a fruity, dried-pear finish.
U.S.: \$5.95 U.K.: N/A

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: BRAZIL

LA FLOR DOMINICANA PETITE LA NOX

Tart at first, this full-bodied cigar takes on heartier notes of wood, coconut and sweet licorice before a sweet-and-sour finish.
U.S.: \$7.40 U.K.: N/A

89



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4 3/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: DECEMBER 2016

QUAI D'ORSAY SECRETO CUBANO EXCLUSIVO FRANCIA

A golden-brown petit corona with a three-seam cap. It starts floral and woody but builds to a earthy, peppery character with a hint of cream espresso on the finish.
U.S.: N/A FRANCE: 7.90 EURO

89

**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4 3/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2016

TRINIDAD REYES

Pale and pigtailed, this petit corona is more full-bodied than it looks. Initial notes of salt and dried flowers become sweet-and-spicy with a briny, rustic finish.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £11.93

89**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4 1/4"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA,
COLOMBIA
BINDER: COSTA RICA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

7-20-4 FACTORY 57 DOG WALKER

Lots of smoke comes off each puff of this little cigar. It's nutty and spicy with cinnamon notes and a mineral finish.

U.S.: \$6.00 U.K.: N/A

88**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 4 3/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA IMPERIOSA MINUTOS

Notes of raisins and leather manage to get through the firm draw of this dark little cigar, but the smoke turns a bit sharp with heavy charcoal.

U.S.: \$6.30 U.K.: N/A

88**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

TATUAJE HAVANA VI VEROCÚ NO. 5

Very strong, acidic first puffs calm down leaving earth and coffee bean impressions on the palate along with an earthy, bitter chocolate finish.

U.S.: \$4.50 U.K.: N/A

88**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP., MEXICO
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

MACANUDO CAFÉ PETIT CORONA

A light, mild cigar whose straw-and-hay qualities are fortified with toasty vanilla notes and a flinty finish.

U.S.: \$5.99 U.K.: N/A

87**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

ARTURO FUENTE PETIT CORONA MADURO

This pressed petit corona begins tart and earthy with hints of brown sugar and cereal that lead to a charcoal finish.

U.S.: \$4.80 U.K.: N/A

86**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 41 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

DAVIDOFF SIGNATURE PETIT CORONA

Notes of fruit and flowers have a woody, cedary undertone but are offset by damp earthiness and a slightly musty aroma.

U.S.: \$12.30 U.K.: N/A

86**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

LA PALINA EL DIARIO KB

Strong and spicy, this powerful cigar is overwhelmingly earthy and tarry with a woody core. It could use more balance.

U.S.: \$7.50 U.K.: N/A

85

robustos

It shouldn't come as a big surprise to read the words finesse and elegant to describe a Padrón 1964 Anniversary Series cigar. Seeing how the Toro size scored 94 points, the word consistent should also come to mind, as this brand is usually on top, or at the very least, at the upper echelons of any CIGAR AFICIONADO tasting category it happens to be part of. This blend does not emphasize power so much as it does balance. While strength for strength's sake is more the domain of other brands, the 1964 Anniversary normally has a core of medium-bodied chocolate notes and builds from there. This Toro is no exception. That's not to say that this is a mild smoke—far from it. But the strength seems only incidental to its richness. With more body will naturally come more power. The cigars are made in Nicaragua under the supervision of Jorge Padrón and his father, José Orlando Padrón. The 601 Red Label Habano Robusto scored 90 points and is made in Nicaragua at the La Zona factory. The 601 Series comes in many varieties since the brand was introduced in 2005, but the Red Label Habano is one of the originals.



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 56 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PADRÓN 1964 ANNIVERSARY SERIES TORO
Every puff of this lush cigar finessees the palate with elegant layers of toasty, floral smoke, buttressed by hints of almond, walnut shell and a chocolate finish.
U.S.: \$15.30 U.K.: N/A

94



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

601 RED LABEL HABANO ROBUSTO
Rich notes of vanilla, earth and cedar build to a bold core of roasted coffee bean and nuts. The finish is earthy.
U.S.: \$7.50 U.K.: N/A

90



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

JOYA DE NICARAGUA CUATRO CINCO RESERVA ESPECIAL PETIT CORONA
A dark, box-pressed robusto that exhibits a brawny, meaty smoke with plenty of white and black pepper notes and a sweet, woody finish.
U.S.: \$8.00 U.K.: N/A

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA FLOR DOMINICANA RESERVA ESPECIAL ROBUSTO
Slightly flattened and pressed, this robusto delivers a tangy, sweet-and-sour smoke with hints of raisin and a wine-like finish.
U.S.: \$8.90 U.K.: N/A

89



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: BRAZIL
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. HABANO

LIGA PRIVADA T52 ROBUSTO
Woody and oaky, this dark cigar forms a solid ash. Notes of licorice precede a bitter chocolate finish.
U.S.: \$12.70 U.K.: N/A

89

**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 3/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JUNE 2015

MONTECRISTO EDMUNDO (TUBO)

Initial puffs of this plump cigar are floral and nutty. It gains strength and intensity, taking on notes of espresso and earth before a heavily floral finish
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £24.80

89

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: MEXICO, NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

TATUAJE NÉGOCIANT MONOPOLE NO. 1

Slightly tapered at the shoulders, this tan cigar is floral and sweet with tart hints of citrus and a black tea finish. A pleasant, mild to medium-bodied smoke.
U.S.: \$10.00 U.K.: N/A

89

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

QUESADA TRIBUTO JULIO

An attractive robusto with a big, spicy cardamom aroma. Its earthy core is framed by notes of brown sugar and chocolate, but the finish is a bit metallic.
U.S.: \$7.43 U.K.: N/A

88

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

VEGAFINA NICARAGUA ROBUSTO

Covered in a discolored wrapper, this cigar delivers a scattered array of flavors that range from almond, wood and leather to damp earth and slight waxiness.
U.S.: \$6.30 U.K.: N/A

88

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: BRAZIL

BRICK HOUSE MADURO ROBUSTO

Notes of cedar, charred oak and bittersweet chocolate become herbal and piney, leaving a eucalyptus after-taste.
U.S.: \$6.00 U.K.: N/A

87

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

OLIVEROS GRAN RETORNO BANJO

A dark and alluring robusto with a hearty smoke smacking of black pepper and coffee bean that segue into a tangy mineral finish.
U.S.: \$7.92 U.K.: N/A

87

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MY FATHER NO. 1 ROBUSTO

Strong and spicy with a tangy affect that's joined by notes of earth and minerals. It's a dark and oily cigar.
U.S.: \$9.70 U.K.: N/A

86

**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

ROCKY PATEL TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY MADURO ROTHSCHILD

The cap of this box-pressed cigar seems to be unpeeling itself. Brawny notes of leather, spice and earth lose intensity, becoming muted and faint.
U.S.: \$10.35 U.K.: N/A

86

Cigars are listed first by country and then by score. Please refer to the main tasting pages for notes and prices.

CIGAR AFICIONADO'S 100-POINT SCALE

Classic
95-100
Outstanding
90-94
Very good to excellent
80-89
Average to good
commercial quality
70-79
Don't waste your money
60-69
Not available
n/a

*Note: all prices are
manufacturers' suggested
retail, before taxes.*

BRAZIL

87 Villiger San'Doro Maduro Toro

CUBA

91 Cohiba Medio Siglo
91 Por Larrañaga Petit Corona
90 Cuaba Salomon
90 Montecristo Dantés Edición Limitada 2016
90 Partagás Serie P No. 2 (Tubo)
90 Punch Punch 48
90 Romeo y Julieta Romeo No. 2 (Tubo)
89 H. Upmann Half Corona
89 Montecristo Edmundo (Tubo)
89 Quai d'Orsay Secreto Cubano Exclusivo Francia
89 Ramon Allones Patagón Exclusivo Cono Sur
89 Trinidad Reyes
88 Juan Lopez Selección No. 1

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

94 Arturo Fuente Don Carlos Eye of the Shark
91 Rocky Patel Dark Dominican Supremo
90 Ashton Virgin Sun Grown Trés Mystique
90 E.P. Carrillo La Historia E-III
89 A. Flores Gran Reserva 1975 Half Corona
89 Ashton Symmetry Prestige
89 Davidoff 702 Series Aniversario Entreacto
89 La Aurora Preferidos 1903 Edicion
Double Barrel Aged Perfecto
89 La Flor Dominicana Petite La Nox
89 La Flor Dominicana Reserva Especial Robusto
89 La Galera 1936 Box Pressed Churchill
88 E.P. Carrillo Short Run 2016 Nicaragua Super Robusto
88 Fratello Oro Shorty
88 Nat Sherman Timeless Collection Churchill
88 Quesada Tributo Julio
88 VegaFina Nicaragua Robusto
87 La Aurora 1495 Churchill
87 La Bohème Mimi
87 Macanudo Café Petit Corona
87 Montecristo Classic No. 2
86 Arturo Fuente Petit Corona Maduro
86 Davidoff Signature Petit Corona
86 Hammer + Sickel Trademark Series Maduro Churchill
86 Romeo y Julieta Reserva Real Churchill

HONDURAS

92 Alec Bradley Post Embargo Lancero
92 Eiroa The First 20 Years 54 x 6 Prensado
91 Alec Bradley Mundial No. 5

90 Padilla Vintage Reserve Figurado
90 Punch Signature Pita
89 Camacho Check Six Toro
89 Hoyo de Monterrey Excalibur No. 1 Maduro
88 7-20-4 Factory 57 Dog Walker
86 Rocky Patel Twentieth Anniversary Maduro Rothschild
85 La Palina El Diario KB
84 Gran Habano Corojo No. 5 Pyramid

NICARAGUA

94 Padrón 1964 Anniversary Series Toro
94 Padrón Serie 1926 No. 2
93 Archetype Axis Mundi Toro
92 Enclave Figurado
92 Regius Exclusivo U.S.A. Pressed Perfecto
92 Rocky Patel Special Edition Robusto
91 Illusione Haut 10 Robusto Extra
91 Romeo 505 Nicaragua by Romeo y Julieta Churchill
90 601 Red Label Habano Robusto
90 Cornelius & Anthony Venganza Silencer
90 Oliva Serie O No. 4
90 The Tabernacle Torpedo
90 Viaje Exclusivo Nicaragua CG
89 Casa Magna Colorado Pikito
89 Cohiba Nicaragua N45
89 Joya de Nicaragua Cuatro Cinco Reserva Especial
Petit Corona
89 Liga Privada T52 Robusto
89 Nub Maduro 460
89 Padrón Dámaso No. 17
89 Tatuaje Négociant Monopole No. 1
88 La Imperiosa Minutos
88 Last Call Maduro by A.J. Fernandez Chiquitas
88 My Father Le Bijou 1922 Churchill
88 Tatuaje Havana VI Verocú No. 5
87 Brick House Maduro Robusto
87 Oliveros Gran Retorno Banjo
87 Perdomo Small Batch Series Maduro Half Corona
87 Undercrown Shade Corona Doble
86 J. Fuego 777 Maduro Silver Corona Gorda
86 My Father No. 1 Robusto

U.S.A.

92 Casa Fernandez Aganorsa Leaf Torpedo

For my humidor,
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CHRISTIAN EIROA
CLE CIGARS



CELEBRATING 20 YEARS AS THE GLOBAL
LEADER IN 2-WAY HUMIDITY CONTROL

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connoisseur's corner

A corona-sized pre-Castro Cuban joined our small club of perfect cigars. The cigar, wrapped in a sleeve of cedar for the last 60 or so years, exhibited not only a perfect draw and burn, but a panoply of fine flavors. Three younger and far larger Cubans (a Bolivar, Ramon Allones and Hoyo de Monterrey) also scored well, each earning our classic accolade. ■ Some believe that only Cuban cigars improve over time. They are mistaken. There is a pair of non-Cubans in this impressive roundup. A Coronado by La Flor, rolled in the Dominican Republic seven years ago, earned a classic rating. A Miami-made Padilla with a decade of age also scored well. When it comes to aging a cigar, you only need to start with a fine smoke. Don't fret about where it was rolled.



POR LARRAÑAGA LARRA EN CEDRO N.C.H.W. (CIRCA 1957)

This cigar is elegant and mild, with a superb mix of sweet spices such as nutmeg and cinnamon. The draw is divine, perfect, delivering rich smoke to the palate with just the right amount of tug, and the finish is slightly flinty. Absolutely delicious.

—Marvin R. Shanken

100



HOYO DE MONTERREY DOUBLE CORONA (1993)

The wrapper on this lovely big cigar is the color of a bar of milk chocolate, and the foot takes hungrily to the soft flame of a butane lighter. The draw is spot on, and the burn quickly evens out after a rough start. The old cigar takes time to awaken, revealing light sprinkles of baking spices and cream, building in power to show cedar wood, slate and a touch of earth as the smoke goes on. Quite elegant at this stage, if not as robust as it was in its youth. —David Savona

98



BOLIVAR CORONA GIGANTE (1995)

This stately, box-pressed Churchill takes a bit of time to warm up, showing some earthy grit at first. As it warms, the flavor blossoms, with a blast of sweet nutmeg spice, toasted corn and savory coconut. It gets sweeter as it goes, eventually taking on a honeyed wood character that's wonderfully pleasant. The cigar burns and draws like a charm, with balance and big flavor. Despite being 22 years old, it seems far from its peak. —David Savona

97



CORONADO BY LA FLOR LANCERO (2010)

A wonderful, full-bodied smoke with a great draw and burn. There is a robust coffee note at the start, which smooths out, taking on a solid nuttiness on the mid-palate. The long finish has a pleasing sweet earthiness with a touch of leather. This cigar still has many years of aging left. —Gordon Mott

96



RAMON ALLONES GIGANTE (2009)

This beautiful double corona has the refinement of age while retaining the vigor of youth. It's a toasty smoke throughout, picking up sweet, chewy notes of almond-studded nougat before showing the meaty, unctuous qualities of sizzling beef fat. Final puffs are of black tea and freshly muddled mint. A cigar that smokes like a full dinner service in five solid ashes. —Gregory Mottola

96



PADILLA SIGNATURE 1932 OSCURO CHURCHILL (2007)

The brownish tint of the cellophane speaks to the age of this Miami-made cigar. It's spent more than 10 years in a limited-edition humidor, and there aren't many of these left. Time has tempered this once powerful smoke. Ghostly hints of black pepper, earth and coffee are far more nuanced. It's become a sweet, herbal cigar that calls to mind molasses, dried flowers and the woodiness of its own humidor. —Gregory Mottola

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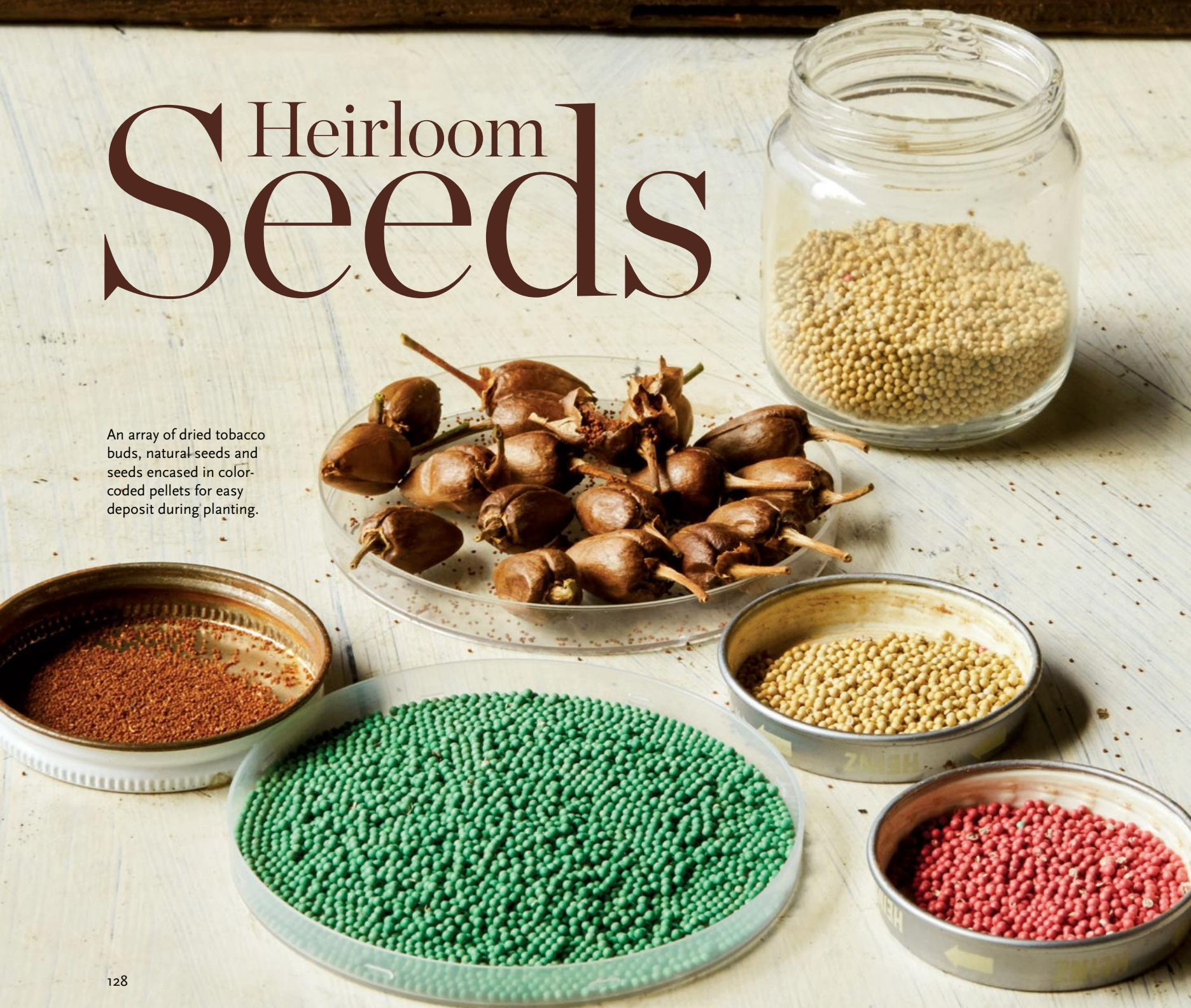


ESCAPE TO PARADISE

SAN CRISTOBAL

Heirloom Seeds

An array of dried tobacco buds, natural seeds and seeds encased in color-coded pellets for easy deposit during planting.





Perhaps more valuable than cold cash, shelves of tobacco seeds are well protected in General Cigar's seed bank, a refrigerated vault of restricted access.

Have you ever heard the cranky old-timers complain that the cigars they used to smoke tasted different? They're not just waxing poetic about a bygone era. They're actually correct. Cigar tobacco today certainly isn't the same as it was 50 years ago. As time goes on, older strains of tobacco varieties have been replaced with newer strains that are more disease resistant, or yield more leaves per plant and more tobacco per acre. Once a new tobacco is deemed more robust or fruitful than its predecessor, the old seeds are retired, and with it, the old taste.

Some of those old tobaccos are probably gone forever, but today, a few of those old heirloom tobaccos are finding new life in the cigar market through careful, selective seed regeneration programs. Companies such as Altadis U.S.A., Plasencia, and General Cigar have gone into their seed archives and resurrected tobaccos that we haven't smoked in as much as 50 years.

"What's old is new again, that was the idea," says Ernest Gocaj in an Albanian accent. He's the director of tobacco procurement for General Cigar and instrumental in its seed regeneration program. Gocaj stands in a chilly, refrigerated room along with Jhonys Diaz, General's vice president of operations in the Dominican Republic, and Francisco "Don Quico" Hernandez, general manager of tobacco growing and long filler processing. These are the heavyweights of General's tobacco team, and they seem unbothered by the cold air. They're far more interested in what's in front of them: seeds. Shelves and shelves of jarred tobacco seeds.

Tobacco growers are looking to the past for new flavor, working with old seeds once lost to the annals of time

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA
PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID YELLEN

This is the seed vault. To the average person, the room may look and feel like nothing more than a walk-in refrigerator, but to General Cigar, it's the heart, heritage and history of the entire company.

The vault is fire proof, and protected by two sets of locked doors, one of them made of steel.

It's cloistered within General Cigar Dominicana, the large factory in Santiago that produces brands like Macanudo and Partagas. It's kept at 39 degrees Fahrenheit, sometimes cooler but never warmer. At this temperature, a seed can last for decades, and that, of course, is the idea. The room contains heirloom seeds from long ago, current hybrids and experimental seeds. Altogether, there are enough seeds here to grow more than 250,000 acres of tobacco.

"In 2010, the market was pushing us to create something different and unique," says Diaz. "We were always doing this type of R&D in the past, but 2010 is when there was a large effort to do something very creative."

Being creative meant turning back the clock, trying to present the modern cigar smoker a chance to see how Macanudos or non-Cuban Partagas cigars used to taste. The company has resurrected some of its heirloom tobaccos, using them as the foundation for modern hybrids aimed at creating period-piece cigars for today's smoker.

General's seed library is vast, and each jar contains millions of seeds, all labeled rather unceremoniously with handwritten stickers, classified by seed type, farm and year. A jar of seed 911, codename "Moses 14," for example, sits next to a jar of Havana 2000, codename "Tower 21."

Tower? 911? It all seems rather ominous until Gocaj points to Moses.

“That’s an old seed. It was Senior’s favorite,” he explains, referring to the late Edgar Cullman Sr., former owner and patriarch of General Cigar. “It’s an old Connecticut seed and produces slightly darker leaves than normal Connecticut tobacco, but we couldn’t make it in commercial quantities. The yield was too low.”

The process of resurrecting an heirloom tobacco is long and expensive. General tried to bring back about 21 heirloom seeds, but most didn’t perform as well as hoped. For some seeds, the yield was far too low. For others, the tobacco’s original flavor profile and characteristics seemed to have been compromised in the growing process. Others still had leaves that did not grow to adequate size, and there were some that still proved too susceptible to the many diseases that can harm a tobacco plant.

General finally found success with two seeds from antiquity. They called the final seeds M01 and M02.



Left: A germination station of seed trays in Mao, the Dominican Republic at General’s farm. Seedlings must grow into plants before they go into the field. Right: Yargüera tobacco for Altadis thrives in Honduras. The heirloom seed was brought to Honduras in the 1960s and recently resurrected for Altadis.

The M01 strain is based on a 50-year-old seed associated with the first non-Cuban Partagas cigars. Today, it has been reincarnated as the Partagas Ramon y Ramon brand, a line of cigars introduced last year. It was blended as a tribute to Ramón Cifuentes Toriello who carried the Partagas brand from Cuba to the Dominican Republic.

The M02 cultivar comes from the same seed type used on Macanudos from the 1960s. This resurrected tobacco can be found in a brand called Macanudo Mao, which is a limited edition that came out in 2016.

Here’s how they did it: First, the company went into its archives and found the heirloom Dominican seed from the 1960s, which it dubbed seed “M” (most likely for Macanudo). Then, it created a hybrid, cross-pollinating the M seed with another old Connecticut seed called D3, which is a strain that resists black shank, a fungus that can rot the roots of a tobacco plant. After that, General continued to backcross the resulting seeds with the old “M” seeds in order to create a tobacco that inherited the disease resistance of D3 yet still retained the desired flavor and aroma characteristics of the original heirloom.

“The first and second years of cultivating this seed was very difficult because the plantings were dying,” recalls Gocaj. “They don’t all survive. You only collect the seeds from the plants that survive. Then you do the crossing again. After several crossings you get the disease resistance. Once the tobacco can resist black shank, you have to back cross it with the original seed again to achieve the flavor characteristics.”

Seems like farming 101, but it’s a long process of selection that took four years to complete. General grew plots of its experimental tobacco both in Connecticut and in the Mao region of the Dominican Republic in order to see which climate the tobacco preferred. It fared better in Mao.

“Climate imparts the flavor, but soil affects the texture and the thickness,” Gocaj says. “Backcrossing preserves the most desirable attributes while crossing gives the original seed new characteristics such as disease resistance.” So it required General to move forward and backward at the same time.

By 2013, the M01 and M02 tobaccos were agriculturally well established, but it took another few years to properly age and ferment these leaves. Once the tobacco was deemed smokable, General began to experiment with blends, using the special tobacco as part of a filler blend and supplementing with tobaccos that showcase the vintage varieties rather than overpower them. In the case of Partagas Ramon y Ramon, the M01 strain was complemented with Cameroon wrapper and Nicaraguan filler. For Macanudo, the vintage filler was fortified with leaves from Nicaragua and Colombia.

Other cigar companies are also taking a hard, new look at some very old seeds. Altadis U.S.A., makers of famous non-Cuban brands like Montecristo and Romeo y Julieta, has made an aggressive effort to keep its heritage brands modern and relevant, and part of that strategy involves a true heirloom product. Working in the Dominican Republic with their contract growing partner José Mendez & Co., they resurrected a seed from the 1960s called Pilotico, a tobacco that has been off the cigar market for more than three decades.

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FEATURED CIGAR

**ASHTON SYMMETRY
BELICOSO**
DOM. REP. • PRICE: \$12.25 • BODY: MEDIUM TO FULL
For a full tasting, see page two.

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TOP 25 CIGARS OF 2016

THE BEST CIGARS OF THE YEAR will be showcased in the February issue of *Cigar Aficionado* along with the top-rated Best Buys and most exciting New Releases of 2016. But don't forget the regular tasting section, where we also rated 83 cigars. For a preview of the issue's top-scoring smokes, turn to page two.

FIDEL CASTRO: 1926–2016

THE ASHES OF CUBA'S FORMER PRESIDENT FIDEL CASTRO were interred on Sunday in a tomb that reads "Fidel" on a plaque. He died on November 25 and was cremated before his ashes were brought to Santiago de Cuba, 540 miles southeast of Havana and the birthplace of Castro's Revolution. He ruled Cuba for decades after overthrowing the previous Batista regime in 1959 and has been widely regarded as a controversial figure ever since. Many mourned Castro's death as the passing of a benevolent leader. A few hundred miles away in Miami, others saw him as an oppressive dictator and celebrated his death in the streets. Turn to page five for the obituary.

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CIGAR WATCH

FROM THE EDITORS OF CIGAR AFICIONADO
SEPT. 27, 2016 | SIGN UP

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FEATURED CIGAR

Punch Gran Puro Santa Rita (91 Points)

The Punch Gran Puro line came onto the scene in 2003 as General Cigar's only Honduran puro, meaning that it uses only tobacco from Honduras. The Santa Rita size (4 1/2 inches by 52 ring gauge, \$5.29) recently impressed our tasting panel with notes of cashew, hints of fresh coconut and a toasty finish, earning a score of 91 points in August's *Cigar Aficionado*.

[Click For More Punch Gran Puro Ratings](#)

11 Cigars You Should Be Smoking Right Now

Cigar Aficionado's 133rd blind tasting, which appeared in our August 2016 issue, is now live on our website. Of the 82 cigars rated by our panel of editors, 11 non-Cuban cigars scored 91 points or higher. These cigars are considered outstanding on our 100-point scale. So if you're heading to your local brick-and-mortar, here are a few cigars that are sure to please right now.

[Read Full Story](#)

La Palina Launches Value-Priced Goldie

La Palina Cigars has shipped a modified version of its popular Goldie blend called Illumination. The cigar features the same component tobaccos as Goldie minus the rare and expensive medio tiempo leaf that's nestled inside the limited-edition line of Goldie cigars.

[Read Full Story](#)
[La Palina Cigar Ratings](#)

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“In the Dominican Republic, we can only grow one crop in a year and that limits the amount of trials we can perform. It becomes a matter of knowing the current diseases that affect the plants of the seeds you want to regenerate.” —Siegfried Maruschke

“These were the original seeds my grandfather had grown in the Dominican Republic in the 1960s and hadn’t been planted commercially for more than 30 years,” says Siegfried Maruschke of José Mendez & Co.

Pilotico is a derivative of the Piloto Cubano varietal, and seems to run counter to everything a farmer would want. Piloto Cubano is small to begin with, and Dominican farmers are often tempted to grow the more vibrant hybrid San Vicente, which grows more tobacco than Piloto. But Pilotico is even smaller than Piloto, producing a mere 14 leaves per plant as opposed to Piloto’s 18 leaves.

“The time it takes to regenerate a seed can vary from two to six years,” Maruschke explains. “In the Dominican Republic, we can only grow one crop in a year and that limits the amount of trials we can perform. It becomes a matter of knowing the current diseases that affect the plants of the seeds you want to regenerate.”

The regenerated Pilotico tobacco was grown in the Navarette region of the Dominican Republic and debuted commercially in 2015 as part of the filler blend for the limited-edition Montecristo 80th Anniversary cigar.

Seeing how only 40,000 of these anniversary Montecristos were produced, not many people got the opportunity to try the heirloom tobacco. Not at first, anyway. The next year, Pilotico became more available. Once José Mendez & Co. could produce the heirloom in commercial quantities, Altadis introduced the Montecristo Pilotico Pepe Mendez brand.

Altadis recently put out another brand with heirloom tobacco called Yargüera H. Upmann, and it contains a resurrected leaf from nearly 50 years ago.

“In 1960, Don Jorge Bueso Arias, founder of La Flor de Copan, brought a variety of seeds to Honduras directly from Cuba,” says Joel Alvarenga of Altadis U.S.A. He runs the company’s Honduran operations, which includes the Flor de Copan factory. Altadis wanted to bring back the taste of that old seed, naming it Yargüera 2013 after the estate where the leaf is cultivated, in the mountainous farmlands of northeast Honduras.

“It adapted to our soils and climate, thus reaching the desired, unique characteristics: sweet flavor and concentrated aroma,” he says.

In order to work with this particular heirloom seed, Altadis (which has seed vaults of its own) looked to its team of agronomists and decided to cross it with a strong Criollo ’98 seed, which was selected for its ability to resist disease, grow large leaves and produce bountiful yields. While it might be everything a tobacco grower wants in the fields, the end product still needs to taste and smell like the original specimen after barn-curing and fermentation.

“By doing this crossing, it was expected that we would obtain a variety with the best characteristics of both seeds, and therefore be able to offer the market novel blends with unique characteristics,” Alvarenga says.

As a commercially viable tobacco, the Yargüera hybrid took four years to develop, starting in 2009 and ending in 2013. After each seed crossing, the tobacco was smoked and analyzed.



Siegfried Maruschke of José Mendez & Co. resurrected the old Pilotico tobacco for Altadis U.S.A.

“It’s a complex process that requires resources and expert smokers so that in each step, you can select the best plants and at the same time, smoke these tobaccos and find the ones with the best flavor and aroma,” Alvarenga explains.

Once the seed was established and the phenotype locked into the leaf, the Yargüera tobacco was fully cultivated. After curing and fermentation Altadis’ “Grupo de Maestros” got to work blending the tobacco and Yargüera was finally released as a brand last year.

But the word Yargüera on its own doesn’t really resonate with the average cigar smoker, so Altadis attached it to one of its heritage brands, H. Upmann. It made perfect sense—an heirloom tobacco for a heritage cigar. Yargüera H. Upmann was born, and with it, the marketing words “estate tobacco.”

Other cigarmakers have been using heirloom seeds for decades. Consider the Eiroa family, former owners of the Camacho brand, who claim to have the original Corojo seeds from the Rodriguez family from Cuba.

The Eiroas made the word “Corojo” a household name among American cigar smokers with their Camacho Corojo brand released in 1999, before it was sold to Oettinger Davidoff.

“Authentic Corojo seed disappeared from Cuba due to blue mold and low yield,” Christian Eiroa recalls. He no longer is part of Camacho, but he now has his own cigar company, CLE, that uses Corojo grown by his father Julio. “It was in 1997 when my father grew the first crop in Honduras. He had gotten the seed from Daniel Rodriguez himself who had been growing it in Nicaragua. His grandfather, Diego Rodriguez originated the seed in his farm, Santa Inez del Corojo.”

Corojo was a legendary leaf in Cuba, but the seed proved vulnerable to blue mold and was retired from Cuban production, eventually replaced by a more disease-resistant hybrid called Havana 2000, which was itself replaced by later seeds in a drive to grow tobacco that would fare better against disease. Eiroa is clear that he does not grow any of those newer hybrids, but has stayed faithful to the Corojo heirloom and uses it to this day for his Eiroa 20 Years brand.

“For the first three years we were using the original seed as was handed to my father from Rodriguez,” Eiroa explains. “Nothing was done to those seeds. The germination rates were low,” he says. “After the fifth year we began to plant the seeds that were generated from the first crops of the original seeds.”

The Eiroa 20 Years Colorado is a perfect showcase for this heirloom tobacco, because the entire cigar, from filler to binder and wrapper, is made from Corojo seed. When grown in Honduras and aged properly, Eiroa believes the resulting tobacco is pungent and distinct.

“It’s a very rugged tobacco aroma, but with a hint of honey,” he explains. “The flavor is very old-fashioned and only a tad sweet.”

Another fickle Cuban heirloom seed is Pelo d’Oro. Translated to “golden hair,” this tobacco was first grown in Cuba back in the 1930s. It has always been prized not only for its excellent flavor and aroma, but

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for its uniform leaves and high percentage of wrapper—that is, when the plant didn’t die from disease. Despite Pelo d’Oro’s otherwise beautiful properties, it wasn’t particularly robust in the field, and highly vulnerable to the black shank disease.

A few Cuban farmers still grow it today but not in commercial quantities, so for all practical purposes, Pelo d’Oro is a retired seed.

While Cuba may no longer be interested in Pelo d’Oro, the whimsical tobacco has intrigued growers from other countries. Jaime Gracia of My Father Cigars has been growing it in Nicaragua since 2007. He started by planting Pelo d’Oro in Estelí, but now plants it in the Jalapa region as well.

“It is a very difficult seed” he says. “Very susceptible to disease, but it’s responded very well here due to the characteristics of the soil in Nicaragua.”

When he first started with Pelo d’Oro, Garcia planted only two manzanas (about three and a half acres) of the tobacco. Today, between both regions, he grows 20 manzanas (about 35 acres).

“Its aroma is strong and very pleasant which makes this seed very unique,” Garcia explains. “It’s sweet on the palate, but the ligeros are very strong.”

The Pelo d’Oro he grows comes from original seeds that have not been crossed with other varietals, so the resulting tobacco could be considered genetically Cuban with a Nicaraguan accent. Garcia doesn’t grow enough of it for any of his regular-production cigars, but his Pelo d’Oro can be found in small releases such as the Jaime Garcia Reserva Especial Limited Edition 2017 as well as the Garcia & Garcia brand.

The strange seed also piqued the curiosity of A.J. Fernandez, who produces around eight acres of Pelo d’Oro on a farm he calls San Diego, also in Nicaragua’s Estelí region.

“I grow the original seed but with lots of care because it’s extremely susceptible to disease,” he says. “For me, it has become a real challenge, but one I have embraced. Pelo d’Oro is very sweet and aromatic but also adds balance, which is one of the most important characteristics I try to implement in my blends.”

Right now, Fernandez’s Pelo d’Oro tobacco can be found in a contract brand he produces for Boutique Blends Cigars called Aging Room Small Batch Pelo de Oro.

“I’m also putting away some crops for a very special blend. A future AJ Fernandez brand,” Fernandez says.

Fans of broadleaf cigars may not realize that they are smoking an heirloom when they puff. Only in Connecticut, tobacco heirlooms are referred to as “foundation” tobaccos. Grown in the Connecticut River Valley, the foundation strains used today are referred to as C9 and C33 and are direct descendants of 50-year-old seeds.

Broadleaf tobacco as we know it didn’t arrive in the Connecticut River Valley until 1833, when B.P. Barbour of East Windsor planted a

seed from Maryland that produced fatter, broader plants than the variety known as shoestring that was prevalent before. According to P.J. Anderson’s book *Growing Tobacco in Connecticut*, the new tobacco was so superior to the type previously grown that within a few years it entirely supplanted shoestring.

“I am not sure of anyone that has the original Barbour seeds,” says Nick Melillo, owner of Foundation Cigar Co., who relies on foundation broadleaf for his Tabernacle and Charter Oak brands. “There was also

said to be some old sub-types called John Williams, Hockanum and Bantle. I’m not too familiar with these and I am not sure if they still exist. There is another old strain called Frank Roberts but I have only seen it in books and have never seen any farmers with it. But C9 and C33 are heirloom.”

In Nicaragua, the Plasencia family is looking to bring back some heirlooms of their own and examining some of Central America’s oldest seeds. The Plasencias are one of the largest growers of premium tobacco in Nicaragua.

“Our genetic department is working on regenerating the old seeds grown in Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama,” says Nestor Andrés Plasencia. “The old Nicaraguan seed is called Chicagre [a portmanteau of the words chilli, picante and agre], in Panama, the seed is Negro Panama. They happen to be very susceptible to disease.”

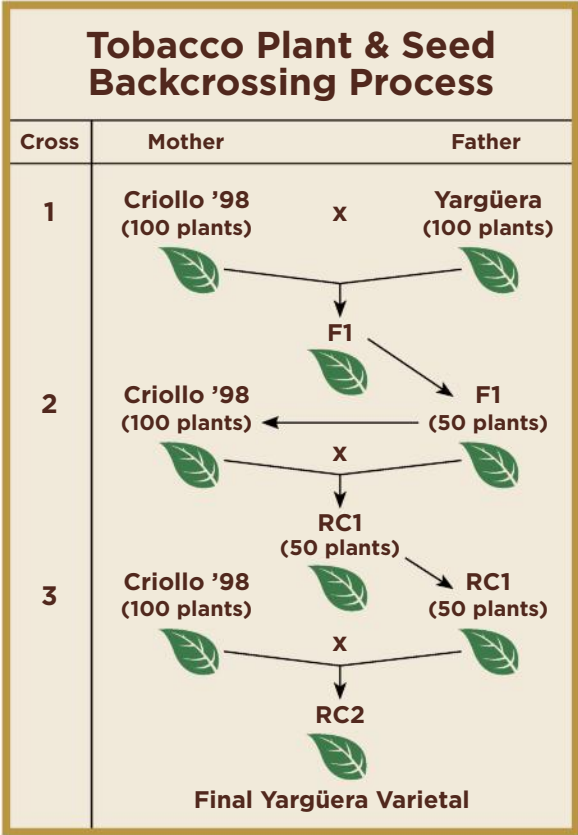
So far, he only has two out of three. Plasencia says that he hasn’t found the oldest Honduran seed yet, a forgotten tobacco called Copaneco. As for the seeds he does have, Plasencia is planting them in areas known to be infested with black shank. His agronomists collect the seeds from the tobacco plants that

best resist the fungus and save them to produce a stronger generation of plants. It’s simple natural selection.

“The Negro Panama is strong and takes longer to ferment, but it has a great taste,” Plasencia says. “There are some studies that say the Nicaraguan seed dates back to the 1700s,” he adds. What Plasencia plans to do with these old tobaccos exactly is still up in the air. Perhaps he will sell it to a cigarmaker who wants something different. Or perhaps he will put it in one of his own brands.

Whether these companies truly succeed in faithfully recreating the taste of tobacco from 50 years ago doesn’t really matter. What’s important is that it’s something different. Unlike the cultivation of heirloom vegetables, heirloom tobacco isn’t necessarily about historical preservation, nor is it a revolt against genetically modified organisms. In the small world of premium tobacco, heirloom revival is simply about novelty and flavor.

Right now, the cigar industry is bogged down by the nagging demand for new products and new smoking experiences. For the time being, heirloom tobaccos might satisfy that need. If cigar-smokers get tired of the current crop of antiquated varietals, there’s always the next new, old seed. ❖



An heirloom seed is regenerated through a series of cross-pollinations. The original seeds are crossed with Criollo '98 until the final Yargüera varietal is achieved.



The 2017 Night to Remember featured outstanding generosity, raising \$1.6 million. At the head table, from left: John Salley; former New York City Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani; Michael Milken; Hazel Shanken; Marvin R. Shanken, editor & publisher of CIGAR AFICIONADO magazine; Ray Lewis and Rush Limbaugh.

Night To Remember

A \$1.6 Million Charity Dinner for Prostate Cancer Research

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA • PHOTOGRAPHS BY JONATHAN LOCKWOOD SMITH

Marvin Shanken, editor and publisher of CIGAR AFICIONADO magazine, was looking squarely at Rush Limbaugh, who had an unlit cigar in his mouth, impatiently waiting to light up. Limbaugh, the radio star, was seated at the head table with an unlikely mix of people: Ray Lewis, who won two Super Bowls with the Baltimore Ravens; former NBA superstar John Salley; financier Michael Milken and Rudy Giuliani, who stood tall as Mayor of New York City on 9/11. Despite their vastly different backgrounds, they were brought together by the Night to Remember, the charity cigar dinner created by Shanken to raise money for prostate cancer research. On this particular April evening, the event raised \$1.6 million.

"Welcome to the 23rd Night to Remember," said Shanken. "I haven't added it all up exactly, but over the years, we've raised \$20 million to \$30 million for prostate cancer." The money has come from the generosity of the cigar, wine, spirits and financial industries, reducing the mortality rate of prostate cancer, and the well-funded research brings breakthroughs in immunology and treatment.

Limbaugh still fretted with his cigar, but Shanken made it clear—he couldn't smoke. Not in The Pool restaurant anyway. If The Pool doesn't sound familiar, you may know it as the former Four Seasons Restaurant. It's now under new ownership, and while it looks pretty much the same, new rules imposed by the building meant that Limbaugh and 220 guests had to smoke in a tent outside on Park Avenue.

"I was told that the owner of the building forbids smoking," said Shanken. "But we're here, and we have a spectacular tent."

A semi-smokeless Night to Remember may have been an unexpected twist for this charity event, but Shanken's Mystery Auction has always been one of the most intriguing highlights of the evening—and one that's provided some of the most entertainment. Bidders don't know what they're actually bidding on. All they know is that it's a rare wine and that the winner has to open up the bottle and share it with the table.

"We're breaking every rule that Christie's and Sotheby's has when it comes to auctions," he said as he started taking bids. "We just make up prices."

Each mystery lot sold for \$40,000 or more, but one in particular—two



Enjoying cigars before the Night to Remember began, from left: Meera Levin, Jeanne Levin, Marvin R. Shanken and Jessica Shanken.



Enjoying fine smokes and premium libations, from left, Stephen Barbo, John Bonello, Munir Dauhajre and Michael Gelband.



Jimmy John Liautaud (left), with Rick Rodriguez, approves of his box of pre-Castro Montecristo cigars, which he acquired at the evening's auction.



Three of the cigarmakers at the Night to Remember enjoying handmade cigars. From left, A.J. Fernandez, Javier Estades and Rafael Nodal.



Chuck Wagner (left), the winemaker of Caymus, takes a moment over cigars and libations with Alan Rubin, owner of the Alec Bradley cigar brand.



Ernesto Perez-Carrillo, Marvin R. Shanken, Wayne Suarez and Ed Rabin puff away after the Night to Remember, which raised \$1.6 million for charity.



The event was held at the recently renovated Pool Restaurant, which is now under the ownership of Major Food Group and chef Mario Carbone.

magnums of Bordeaux—was bought and re-donated twice before closing for \$220,000. In an unexpected turn, Shanken allowed a bottle of rare Scotch in the auction, which was revealed to be a Port Ellen 37 Year Old, 16th Release, distilled in 1978 and donated by Diageo North America. And the final mystery wine wasn't a wine at all, but a box. Wrapped in the customary brown paper, it was revealed to contain two boxes of pre-Castro Montecristo Cuban cigars. They went for \$60,000.

"These were bought by Edgar Cullman Sr. in 1958," said Shanken, referring to the former owner of General Cigar Co. The boxes were donated by his son Edgar Cullman Jr., who was at the dinner.

The mystery wines, Scotch and cigars alone raised \$550,000, and the main auction began. It consisted of 13 lots of top-rated wines, exquisite humidors filled with rare cigars, fine whiskies, golf outings, trips around the world and even a humidor signed by Arnold Schwarzenegger. The main auction raised \$329,000, and that total was matched by Milken, bringing the auction totals to \$1.2 million. Adding other donations and the amount raised by tickets to the event, the total came to \$1.6 million.

As dinner was served, the evening took its customary turn to speeches. Limbaugh, who makes his living on his words, could stay silent no more.

"I really want to thank the cigar manufacturers here in this room," he said after the auction in his best broadcast brogue. "Cigars establish a commonality and an opportunity to meet and connect with people you normally wouldn't have. That's what cigars are about."

Giuliani also addressed the crowd. "I came to this dinner 18 years ago because Marvin invited me," he recalled. "My father had prostate cancer.

The next year, I had prostate cancer. The first person to reach out to me was Michael Milken. He and I didn't exactly have a close, personal relationship."

Giuliani prosecuted Milken in the '80s when he was the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York.

"Michael and I have become very good friends," he said. "Now when I hear the word cancer, I don't hear the word death. I hear the word challenge. And in a few years, because of Michael, Marvin and Hazel [Shanken], when I hear the word cancer, I'll hear the word cure."

Foundation founder Michael Milken spoke about advances in cancer research and how the event has had a direct impact on its progress.

"Fifteen million Americans are in remission," said Milken, who is also a survivor of prostate cancer. "A lot of it began with the idea that Marvin and Hazel had so many years ago."

The evening closed with inspirational words from Ray Lewis, who spoke with the cadence of a preacher to his audience.

"Tonight, I see my name next to trailblazers—not pathfinders, but trailblazers—who will one day cure cancer," he said. "And I'm here with people sitting in the room who took control of the moment."

After dinner, the guests enjoyed cigars in the smoke-friendly tent.

"I look forward to this event every year," said Litto Gomez of La Flor Dominicana as he puffed away in the tent on Park Avenue. He was one of many cigarmakers present at Night to Remember and seemed unbothered by having to smoke outside. "It's really great what they do. Not just for us now, but in the future," he said. "I'm not even thinking of myself but my kids. Everyone's kids." ❖

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The Big Smoke Miami was held on a gorgeous night in South Florida, where hundreds of cigar lovers enjoyed some of the finest cigars in the world.

A Big Smoke For Miami Beach

The crowd was festive and lively, their excitement equaled only by that of the cigarmakers. It was CIGAR AFICIONADO's first Miami Big Smoke in nearly 20 years, and the cigar show was being held in the hometown of the premium cigar industry. It was a night of cigars, great cocktails and some of the biggest names in the business.

Held at the luxe Fontainebleau Hotel on Miami Beach on Friday, April 7, the event drew hundreds of eager cigar lovers not only from around Miami but from the New York area, other parts of Florida and the United States and even from Toronto, Canada.

"The Miami Big Smoke was a smashing success," said cigar star Jonathan Drew. "The biggest cigar event in Miami," said Rafael Nodal of Boutique Blends Cigars.

Bacardi was the exclusive drinks sponsor of the evening, and a series of bartenders were kept busy by the thirsty crowd, mixing drinks from the spirits company's large library of brands. There was a D'USSÉ Cognac Lounge, the John Dewar & Son's Fine Scotch Emporiums, Hatuey Beer and Bacardi 8 aged rum. Specialty cocktails included Bacardi 8 Old Fashioneds, D'USSÉ Sidecars and The Penicillin made with Dewar's.

The format was different from other Big Smokes. The audience walked into the ballroom, which was filled with cigarmaker's booths, two full-sized bars, a spread of fine food, a stage with a live band and seating areas. After getting cigars from each station—a ticket entitled you to 36 cigars—you could walk outside to the patio overlooking Miami Beach for

a cigar. The patio also had several bar stations, and the drinks flowed all night. Those who wished to break up the evening could move back and forth between the patio and the inside room.

Cigar stars on hand included: Carlos Fuente Jr. of Arturo Fuente Cigars; Jorge Padrón of Padrón Cigars; Litto Gomez of La Flor Dominicana; Rocky Patel, Nish Patel and Nimish Desai of Rocky Patel Premium Cigars; Ernesto Perez-Carrillo, Lissette Perez-Carrillo and José Blanco of EPC Cigar Co.; Manuel Quesada of Quesada Cigars; Pete Johnson of Tatuaje; Janny, Jaime and other members of the Garcia Family from My Father Cigars; Alan Rubin of Alec Bradley Cigar Co.; Nestor Andrés Plasencia of Plasencia Cigars; A.J. Fernandez of AJ Fernandez Cigars; Jonathan Drew and Willy Herrera of Drew Estate; Javier Estades of Altadis; Rafael Nodal of Boutique Blends; Christian Eiroa of CLE Cigars; Michael Herklots of Nat Sherman; Bill Paley, Clay Roberts and Sam Phillips of La Palina; Chip Goldeen of Ashton Distributors; Régis Broersma of General Cigar Co.; Steven Bailey of Cornelius & Anthony Cigars; Erik Espinosa of Espinosa Cigars; Jochy Blanco of Tabacalera Palma; Paul Palmer-Fernandez of Casa Fernandez; David Wagner of Oliva Cigars; Jason Carignan of Ventura Cigars; Jason Wood of La Aurora Cigars; Kevin Newman of El Artista Cigars; Mehul Shah of MBombay Cigars; and Edel Gomez representing Micallef Cigars.

The next Big Smoke takes place in Las Vegas on November 17–19. To order tickets, visit cigaraficionado.com ❖

—David Savona



Representing the University of Miami Hurricanes, from left: cornerbacks coach Mike Rumph, school of communications dean Gregory Shepherd, defensive coordinator Manny Diaz, CIGAR AFICIONADO's Marvin R. Shanken, assistant head coach Craig Kuligowski and safeties coach Ephraim Banda.



It was a beautiful night to be on South Beach, and smiles and smokes abounded. Bo Brandt, left, enjoying great cigars and cocktails on the patio of the Fontainebleau Hotel with Luke and Rachel Branan.



The mood was festive, and the hundreds of consumers who attended the Big Smoke Miami lit up and smoked to their hearts' content.



Consumers had the chance to mingle with some of the biggest names in premium cigars, including Jonathan Drew (left) at the Drew Estate booth.



John Fought, Michael Masters and Ray Lefto traveled from Tampa to Miami for the Big Smoke, and dressed for the perfect Miami weather.



You get more than cigars at a Big Smoke. Enjoying the fruits of the open bar are Ernesto Cayro, Rafael Diaz and Julio Cayro.

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moments to remember

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Dave Sudjian, Bob Zakian, Richard Keshgegian, Mark Santerian, Vaughn Hoplamanzian and Alberto Gaudagnini enjoying fine cigars in Tuscany, Italy.



Paul Essa, Dwayne Brydie and Pete Essa of Smoky's Fine Cigars in Bloomfield, Michigan, light up a few premium cigars aboard the Detroit Princess Riverboat.



Edson Llanes and Luis Perez savor cigars before watching Real Madrid play FC Barcelona in El Clásico at the Santiago Bernabéu Stadium in Madrid, Spain.



Patrick Abbott, left, celebrates his wedding day by sharing Nub Cameroon cigars with his father Ron and his groomsmen on Tybee Island, Georgia.



Friends Eber Dominguez, Roberto Alvarez-Cano, Carolina Sanchez, Shermelle Carrasco, Willy Santiago, Michael Benvenuti, Jessica Banda and Yessica Chagray puffing away at the Grand Havana Room in New York, New York.



After playing 18 holes at Pinehurst Resort, the Williams, Venanzio and Massoud families enjoy premium libations alongside their favorite cigars while lounging on the back porch overlooking the 18th green of the No. 2 course.



Ron Johnson and Wes McSpadden light up a couple of Cohibas during a round at the Winter Creek Golf and Country Club in Blanchard, Oklahoma.



University of Houston alumni Rod Johnson and Gregory Perrin savor a couple of premium cigars at an Alpha Phi Alpha reunion party in Houston, Texas.



On his birthday, Jim Schoonveld enjoys the finer things in life, sipping a cold beer while puffing on a cigar alongside his wife Deb in Chesapeake, Virginia.



Charles Evans and Steve Miller share a few cigars with Rocky Patel of Rocky Patel Premium Cigars at Old Havana Cigar Shop in West Chester, Pennsylvania.



Michael Ratzker of Englewood, New Jersey, and Carlos Hernandez of Germany pair a couple of tall beers with premium cigars in Munich, Germany.



Wayne Foster and Robert Owen send a chilly cheers from Canada as they enjoy cigars and Scotch after clearing their driveways of snow in Sudbury, Ontario.



Stelios Chrysandreas and his daughter Elena bond with a couple of Davidoff cigars inside New York City's Paley Park.



Cousins Fulvio Savini, Ezio Savini, Bruno Savini, Emidio Conte, Rudy Savini and Peter Mancini puff on premium handrolled Honduran cigars during a family barbecue in Woodbridge, Ontario, Canada.



Celebrating freedom with premium handrolled cigars, Dan and Sheila Powers host a Fourth of July party at their home in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where guests hoist their fine smokes from Drew Estate, Rocky Patel Premium Cigars and Oliva Cigar Co. (along with a couple of issues of a certain cigar magazine).



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Alex Gross and Joanne Chesler Gross pair cigars with fine whiskies during a tasting event at New York Prime in Atlanta, Georgia.



Christina Holgate of Calgary, Canada, meets Jorge Padrón of Padrón Cigars at CIGAR AFICIONADO's Big Smoke in Las Vegas, Nevada.



A family that smokes together stays together. Larry Rosinski and his sons Andy, Frank and Larry light up Montecristos after watching Cactus League spring training baseball in Chandler, Arizona.



Jennifer Rodriguez and Chris Rogers savor a lovely wedding day in Tampa, Florida, by lighting up a couple of premium handrolled cigars.



Jason Valchine puffs on an Oliva Serie G alongside his cousin Katie Kidd on her wedding day at Frutig Farms in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

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Taylor Hiott, Greg Myers, Shawn Carroll and Mark Jenkins from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, pose for a picture outside of La Gran Fabrica Drew Estate during the Cigar Safari in Estelí, Nicaragua.



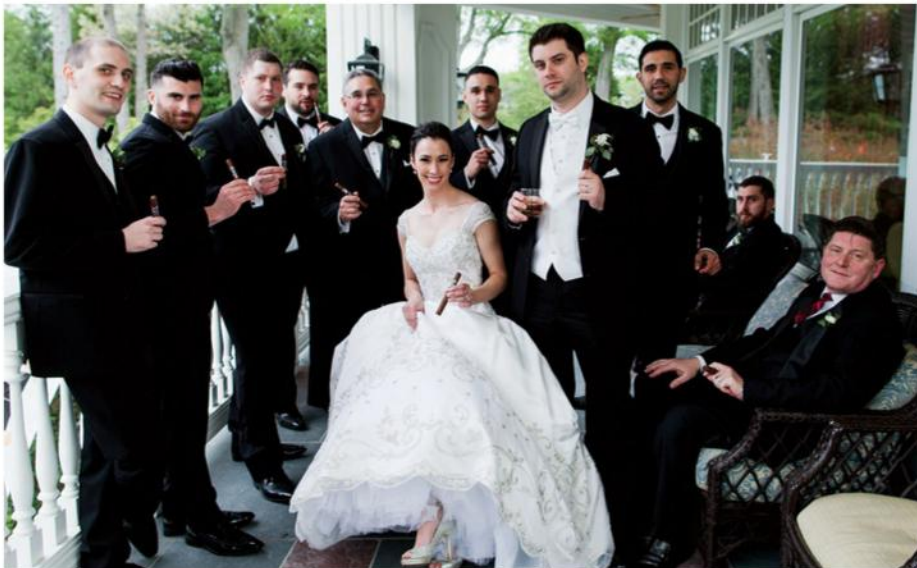
Cyril Kalkman, Han Hilderink and Patrick Habing share a premium cigar with CAO's brand ambassador Rick Rodriguez (center left) at the Whisky & Cigar Salon in Gronau, Germany.



Pearl Harbor survivor and World War II veteran David Mears celebrates his 95th birthday with a premium cigar and an ice cold beer alongside his nephew Justin Rains in Fresno, California.



Jeffrey Fishel and Jeannine Feltman celebrate their June wedding by savoring cigars alongside their wedding party at the Redondo Beach Historic Library in Redondo Beach, California.



Newlyweds Paul-Anthony Dudzinski and Diana Mary Mazurek puff on Don Pepin Garcia cigars while surrounded by friends and family at their wedding party in Farmingdale, New Jersey.



Nothing tops off a round of golf quite like a cocktail and a fine cigar. Larry Bolby, John Burtoft and Bill Peck relax at the 19th hole of the Arnold Palmer Country Club in The Villages, Florida.

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Congratulations to groom Steven Mayes, who commemorates his wedding to Ibis Feria-Mayes by enjoying a premium cigar and libation alongside his friends and family in Winter Park, Florida.



Marcus Pollard (left), Bob Volpert (middle) and Larry Johnson (right) get ready to light up a few cigars while on a six-day rafting trip on the Middle Fork of the Salmon River in central Idaho.



Andrew Holtz, Matthew Holtz, Jared Rok, Bryan Morjain and Jason Morjain culminate a great round of golf at Old Head Links Golf Club in Cork, Ireland, with a few fine Alec Bradley cigars.



Best friends Frankie Arcuri and Billy Harper bond over fine premium cigars and great music at the Central Market House in Historic York, Pennsylvania.



Brothers and fellow aficionados Randy and Jeff Pierce share a premium smoke during their annual reunion on the Rock River Bayou in Hustisford, Wisconsin.



Nothing complements a fine round of golf like a premium cigar. Jim Feeley and Brian Halloran puff and play at Island's End Golf in Greenport, New York.



Mark and Blake Curtis enjoy father-son time sipping Old Fashioneds and savoring Drew Estate cigars at the Lanesborough Hotel in London, England.



Father and son Rich and Pete Pollinger spending some quality time together while savoring a couple of fine cigars in Marathon Key, Florida.

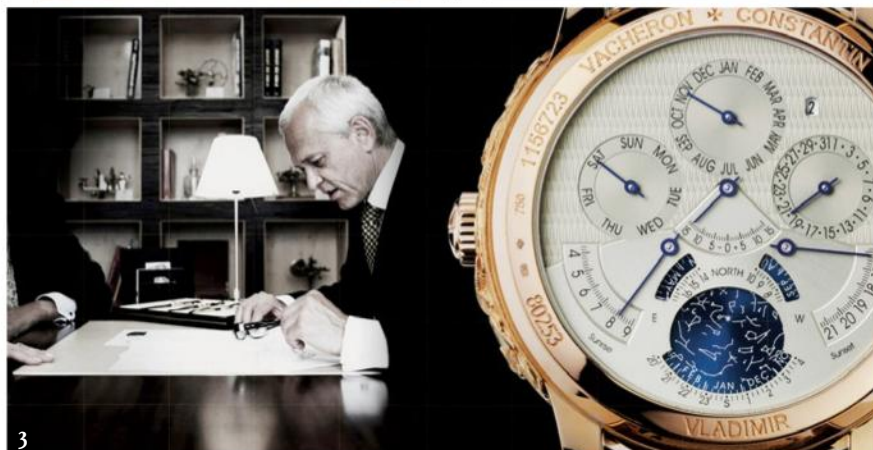


Dan Kurka pairs a premium cigar with the house Cabernet at Cordeiro's Steakhouse in Napa, California, alongside the restaurant's owner Matt Cordeiro.

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made for you



In a world of fast food and one-size-fits-all sensibilities, how often does something feel made especially for you? The “Made for You” section celebrates those items that are created with such high quality of hand workmanship and degree of customization that they become individual to you. In each issue, our editors will endeavor to bring you special things from anywhere on the globe, choosing them solely on the basis of outstanding quality. Our goal is to give you guidance on the best of everything.

1 GROOVY TUNES—PROJECT AUDIO

Fifty years ago, the Beatles released their legendary *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album. To commemorate the psychedelic achievement, Project Audio Systems has created two groovy turntables. The Essential III Sgt. Pepper's Drum (\$555) is an entry-level unit and its platter is decked out to look like the iconic Sgt. Pepper's logo as it appears on the drum on the album cover. Meanwhile the higher-end 2Xperience SB Sgt. Pepper Limited Edition version (\$1,558), which sports a natural wood look with the Sgt. Pepper logo burned into it, will also hit retail this year, albeit only 1,000 units. project-audio.com

2 RETRO SMOKING—VINTAGE ASHTRAYS

Looking for a way to make your man cave or smoking room stand out from the crowd? Adorn it with a vintage ashtray from a famous smoking or drinking haunt of long ago. Perhaps an ashtray from the legendary Hotel Ritz in Paris or the infamous Hotel Watergate in Washington is to your style. Or a jet-black ashtray from the storied Stork Club in New York, which saw use when smoking indoors happened everywhere. newyorkfirst.com and historycompany.com

3 IN YOUR OWN TIME—CUSTOM WATCHES

An elusive limited edition may be a holy grail for watch collectors, but the most exclusive timepiece is a limited edition of only one. Vacheron Constantin's Les Cabinotiers bespoke service builds your watch from scratch or you can customize with a hand-painted enamel dial or an engraved case. If made-to-measure is more your budget, Armin Strom's digital customization platform offers various cases, dials, movement finishes and more, while TAG Heuer's latest Connected has a modular system that also lets you mix and match elements. vacheron-constantin.com, arminstrom.com and tagheuer.com

4 EBIKE EXCITEMENT—RIESE & MÜLLER AND STROMER

Around in some form for a century, ebikes mightn't be the latest thing, but their blend of eco-friendliness and exercise is catching up with contemporary technology. Riese & Müller's Load (pictured) offers massive payload and protection for kids along for the ride. Other models are built for touring and gravel-grinding. Stromer's ST1 X boasts a 70-mile touring radius and digital connectivity with an integrated touch-screen interface that reads out speed and battery usage. r-m.de/en-gb/ and stromerbike.com

5 THE LEVITATING LIGHT BULB—FLYTE

If you were the type to deck out your den with lava lamps in the '70s and plasma balls in the '80s, then the floating Flyte light is the natural novelty of choice for the post millennium. Surreal yet stylish, Flyte's Edison bulb (\$349) actually hovers over its wooden base via electromagnetic levitation. Bases and bulbs come in various finishes and accents. It's guaranteed to burn for 50,000 hours—that's 12 hours a day for 11 years. Even Tesla would be titillated. flyte.se

6 NATTY PATTY—ARTISANAL BURGER

Hamburgers on the grill may be the quintessential American summertime meal, but that doesn't mean it couldn't use a little foreign accent. That's the premise behind *Artisanal Burger: 50 Italian Twists on an All-American Favorite* (Mondadori, \$29.95). Author/chefs Enzo De Angelis and Antonio Sorrentino start with quality ingredients and put together creative burgers with names like cultburger, holyxmasburger and wiseburger, using additives such as cucumbers, zucchini, fennel, prosciutto and buche de chevre. And they don't stop at beef, building patties from lobster, seitan, shrimp, chicken and pork. Throw in specialty fries and you've got yourself a cookout. rizzoliusa.com

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